PlayStation 3 PlayStation Portable PlayStation Network PlayStation 2

PlayStation®

OCTOBER 08

The Official Magazine

JIM LEE 2008

DC UNIVERSE ONLINE

WHY IT WILL CHANGE PS3 GAMING FOREVER!

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 11 (October 2008)

»EXCLUSIVE

GODFATHER II FIRST LOOK

»PLUS

KILLZONE 2
GHOSTBUSTERS

»REVIEWED

STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED
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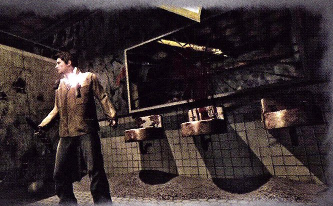

MATURE 17+

M

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Language
Sexual Themes

PLAYSTATION 3

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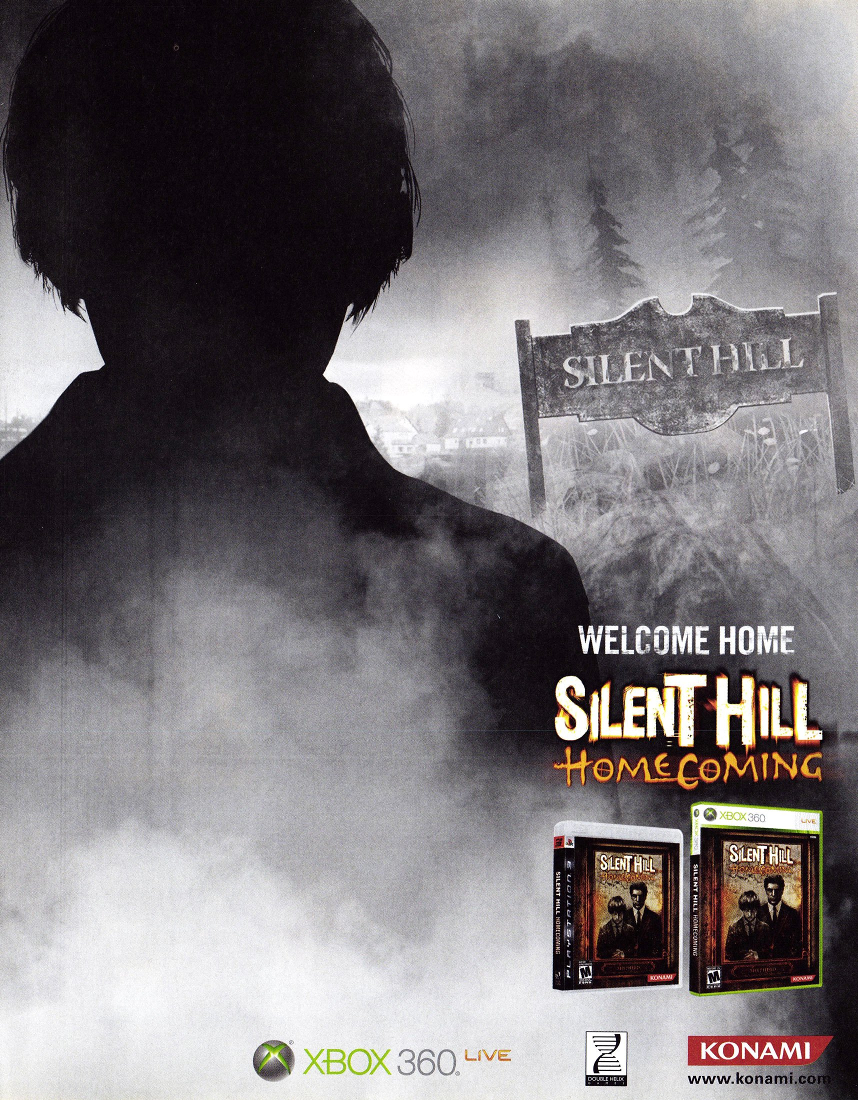
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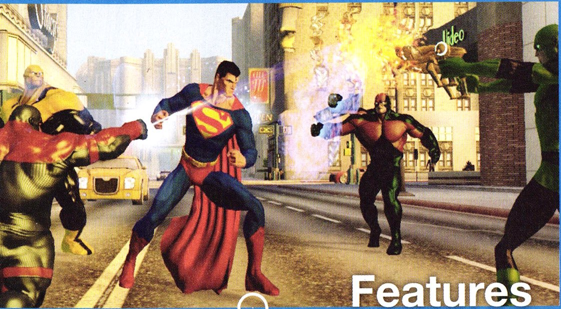

"I'm Super! Thanks for asking!"

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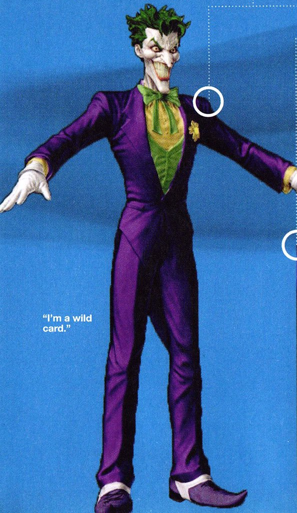
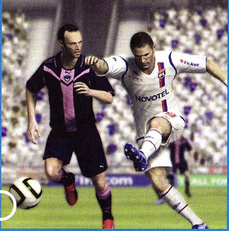
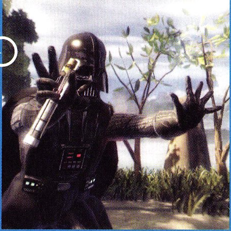
"Altogether wonderful"



"I'm a wild card."

Speak softly and carry a large, blunt drill bit.


"It's not pink. It's fuschia. That's a manly color for a footsy team. And yes, I said *footsy!* So what?"


In his darkest days, Lord Vader briefly contemplated a career as a street mime.

Petal pushers haven't looked this good since the trippy '70s.

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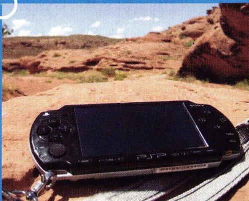
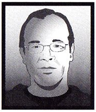
Presented by the PLAYSTATION®Network

Nothing ruins an outfit like sandals. C'mon, ladies, would it kill ya to put on some heels?!

The PSP rocks. We even have a picture that proves it.





Editor's Note

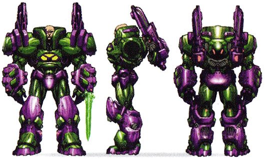
"Will you tell him that when I conduct an interview, I sit anywhere I damn please!"

With every firmware update for PS3 and PSP, and with most new game announcements, online integration and features are becoming a bigger part of the story. On the platform side, online functionality is the largest glaring hole ripe for filling with the features that truly establish the PS3 as the hub of your home media entertainment setup. On the software side, the growing install base and resultant use of and demand for extended online features means developers of all stripes are pushing new ideas.

Adding Trophy support through the ~~2.4~~ 2.41 update was a welcome (if overdue) step to speak to gamers in a language that really does help shape game-playing patterns. I've spent more time on *Super Stardust HD* than really the game deserves. Why? Trophy Whoredom. I'm thrilled that *Uncharted* will receive the Trophy makeover to give another excuse to go through that game. And with the PS3 Greatest Hits line hitting store shelves, the reduced price and potential for Trophy patching should generate a significant spike in the number of PS3 users going online… for free!

Last month we posed the question asking what features you'd like to see next. While we're still sorting through the mail, some of the most prominent sentiments were functions that led to better communication, with various chat or chat room options top of the list. Will Home address that request? Tough to say since it remains something of an enigma, with little clear visibility on the simple question: Why? (Let alone sibling considerations What? and When?) We anticipate more concrete news to come from Sony Europe (SCEE, under whose banner the app is being developed) at the Leipzig Game Convention that will be underway (or have wrapped) by the time you read this. "New announcements for Europe, and some for North America" are promised to us by the head of SCEE PR.

> "...it's clear that a significant part of the PS3 future is online. Question is: are you?"

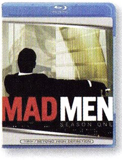


Third-party games are striking out with their own unique online plans. Take *Madden 09* for example. Integration with ESPN's online fantasy football league creates a natural blurring of the lines between where your game experience ends and your general online entertainment consumption begins. In fact, many of EA Sports' titles are embracing online functionality in ways sure to broaden the base of gamers who utilize these functions (and we detail the online plans of both *FIFA* and *NHL* starting on page 28).

And with the potential of Massively Multiplayer Online gaming through our cover feature (page 54), *DC Universe Online* (as well as SOE's action MMO, *The Agency),* it's clear that a significant part of the PS3 future is online. Question is: are you? How many of you have upgraded to PS3 but either don't want or don't have access to broadband Internet? And as part of our ongoing survey, do you have specific features in mind that would tip the balance if you're still on the fence about upgrading? Thoughts to PTOM_letters@futureus.com

Rob

"Quote" contest



Enter to win a Blu-ray movie! Unless you're a first time reader (in which case, welcome) you should know that the headline at the top of this column is a quote from a movie. Identify the movie, send your answer (along with your name and shipping address) to **PTOM_editor@futureus.com** with Ed Note October in the subject line. I'll pick one lucky winner at random to receive a Blu-ray movie. I'll be sending one out to Jordan Dorwart of Louisville, KY, who identified the quote from *Hoosiers.*

PlayStation
The Official Magazine

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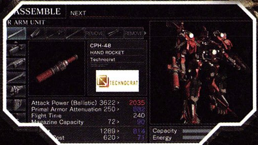
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PLAYSTATION 3

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PS '08 THEORY OF EVERYTHING

PLAYSTATION BY THE #s

E3 has come and gone, along with all the hoopla that surrounds the annual gaming event. But despite its diminished stature, the show still generated a massive amount of hype, especially from SCEA's pre-show PlayStation press conference. Don't worry though, PTOM is here to filter the facts from the fiction with its patented Number-O-Meter™. After all, words can obfuscate, but the numbers don't lie…

Download anime from PSN, then watch it on your PSP. The future has arrived.

1

The number of sign-ons you'll need to connect to the PlayStation Network, no matter where you are or how you connect. SCEA is eager to tout the portability of your identity along with the universality of the wallet management, making it easier for you to connect with friends, set up games, and download all kinds of content no matter where you are.

1.99

The starting price to download TV shows and other content via the PlayStation Network store. Content is now available to rent or to own, in standard or high definition. Movies will be available from $2.99 to $5.99 for rentals, $9.99 to $14.99 to purchase. The content is portable: You can download it to your PS3 or via the PC store, and then place it on a PSP (it can be on multiple devices at the same time). Generally, it will take about an hour to download a two-hour standard-definition movie, but you can start watching the movie about a minute after making the purchase. The service debuted during E3 with about 300 full-length movies and 1,200 TV episodes from a wide range of major studios.

2

The annual point we're at in the PS3 lifecycle. At the same point in the PSone lifecycle, *Crash Bandicoot* and *Tekken* were already available, but *Gran Turismo* and *Final Fantasy VII* were a year away, *Grand Theft Auto* was two years away, and *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* was three years away from release. As for the PS2, *Final Fantasy X, Ico,* and *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* were available, but *GTA: San Andreas* was released in year 4, *God of War* and *Guitar Hero* came in year 5, and *God of War II* hit stores in year 7. The point? There's a heckuva a lot still to come for PS3.

Two also represents the number of years that preparing for the E3 press conference shaves off of SCEA President Jack Tretton's life. It's also the number of times he exercises annually. (His words!)

CONSOLE LIFESPAN

10

Sony's vision for a console lifecycle in an industry where the typical lifespan is 3 to 5 years. According to Tretton, Sony changed the rules by introducing this extended lifecycle. Judging from the PS2's continued success, he ain't exaggerating.

15

On July 20, 1993—15 years ago—the seeds for the PlayStation brand were laid when executives at Sony came together to decide on whether the company should create its own videogame console.

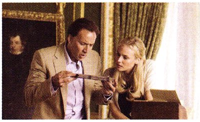
3 The number of Sony's "successful platforms in the market at once" (PS3, PS2, PSP), something that Tretton says no other company has accomplished.

9 The annual point we're at in the PS2 lifecycle

23 The number of exclusive PS3 first-party games coming from SCE's worldwide studios: 10 on Blu-ray, 13 on PSN.

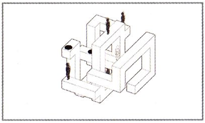
*All numbers and quotes are from SCEA's E3 press conference, hosted by CEO Jack Tretton. Numbers are accurate as of July 2008.

A picture tells 1,000 numbers



Now in "gorgeous resolution," you can watch Nic Cage as he showcases all three of his acting expressions.

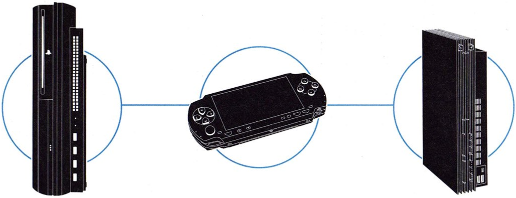
Why is this Chimera so angry? Perhaps because his special E3 moment was upstaged by the *M.A.G.* announcement.



Let's say you don't have a PSP and you haven't played *Echochrome:* You can get both in one package this fall!

Take
06862
Cool!
Take me out
If I move

We saw two Wookiees and a gal dressed as a giant tube of Chapstick performing in a *SingStar* video. WTF?



3

The number of Sony's "successful platforms in the market at once," something that Tretton says no other company has accomplished. In the first half of this year alone, the PS3, PS2, and PSP have sold a whopping 5 million units in the U.S. alone. The fiscal year worldwide goal: 34 million units total across all three platforms!

60

Number of players who can participate in *Resistance 2's* online competitive multiplayer modes. That sounded impressive, until later in the conference when Sony unveiled *M.A.G.* (see: 256).

80

Number of gigabytes in the hard drive of the new PS3 core pack, which will be the primary focus of the hardware line-up going forward. Launched in September with the same functionality of the current 40GB PS3, the new system offers twice the storage capacity for the same $399 price. "This is by far the best combination of memory, graphics, speed, power, and consumer value of any console in the industry today," Tretton claims. "There are millions of PS2 users on the cusp of upgrading to a PS3, and we want to do all we can to make that transition as easy as possible."

129

Current price of the PS2

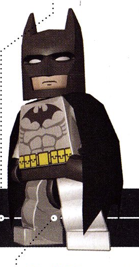
130

Number of new titles coming to the PS2 in 2008

199

The price of a new family-friendly PSP bundle due out this October, which will include:

- Silver PSP
- *Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters*
- The "blockbuster movie" *National Treasure: Book of Secrets* on UMD
- 1GB Memory Stick Duo
- PSN voucher for *Echochrome*



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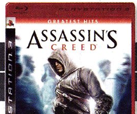


The price of PS3's Greatest Hits line

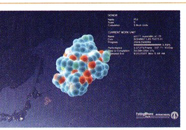
75

Number of overall exclusive titles on PS3 in North America—more than any other console, according to Tretton.

149

Price of the upcoming *Lego Batman* PS2 bundle, which will include the *Justice League: The New Frontier* animated movie on DVD.

MORE ➔



No, that's not the number of brain cells among the collective PTOM staff. Quiet, you.

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CLOVERFIELD
WALK HARD

Finally, movies and TV on your PS3. The best part? You can take your downloads with you on your PSP.

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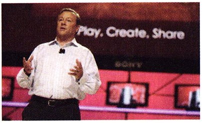
PLAYSTATION 3
80GB

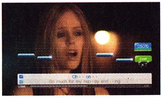
80GBs for the price of 40? That's what's on offer with the latest PS3 core pack.



Jack Tretton is a handsome man. He makes all our dreams come true. We heart him very much.

1.7 million

Number of PS3 users worldwide who have signed up for Folding@home, helping Stanford scientists study the effects of protein folding. This is now the world's most powerful distributed computing system.



1.9 million

Songs downloaded from the SingStore worldwide since the PS3 *SingStar* was released. The *SingStar* franchise has sold more than 15 million units worldwide since it first launched in 2006.

100 million

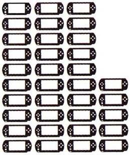
The PSone became the first console to move that many units.

50 billion

Since 1995, the PlayStation brand has generated more than $50 billion at retail.

256

Number of players who can participate in online battles in the newly unveiled SCEA first-party exclusive *M.A.G.* (Massive Action Game), developed by Zipper Interactive. The online battles promise to be bigger than anything ever seen on consoles, with large-scale airborne drops, helicopter insertions, and multi-front assaults. The battles will include only real players, and the combat will be organized in teams of eight, each with a leader who's proven himself to be a strong soldier. The goal: The tactical feel of a squad-based shooter combined with the "climactic intensity" of epic battles. The game also promises character growth, allowing you to fine-tune your soldier, along with ongoing faction-based campaigns. "You've all seen multiplayer online games. You've all played massively multiplayer online games. But you've never seen a massive action online game like this," Tretton gushed when he introduced the game. "This is a workout even for the PS3 architecture. It's not remotely possible anywhere else. There's nothing like it on the market today."



Each PSP represents 1 million users.

35 million

Worldwide installed base for PSP, with 13 million coming from North America. Each PSP comes complete with the newly coined "gorgeous resolution" display.

180 million

Downloads of content from PlayStation Network since November 2006. This number lead to Tretton's top zinger of the show: "We're not interesting in filling up our store with titles that nobody wants to play just so we can say that we have the most games." Ouch!

140 million

Worldwide installed base of PS2.

400

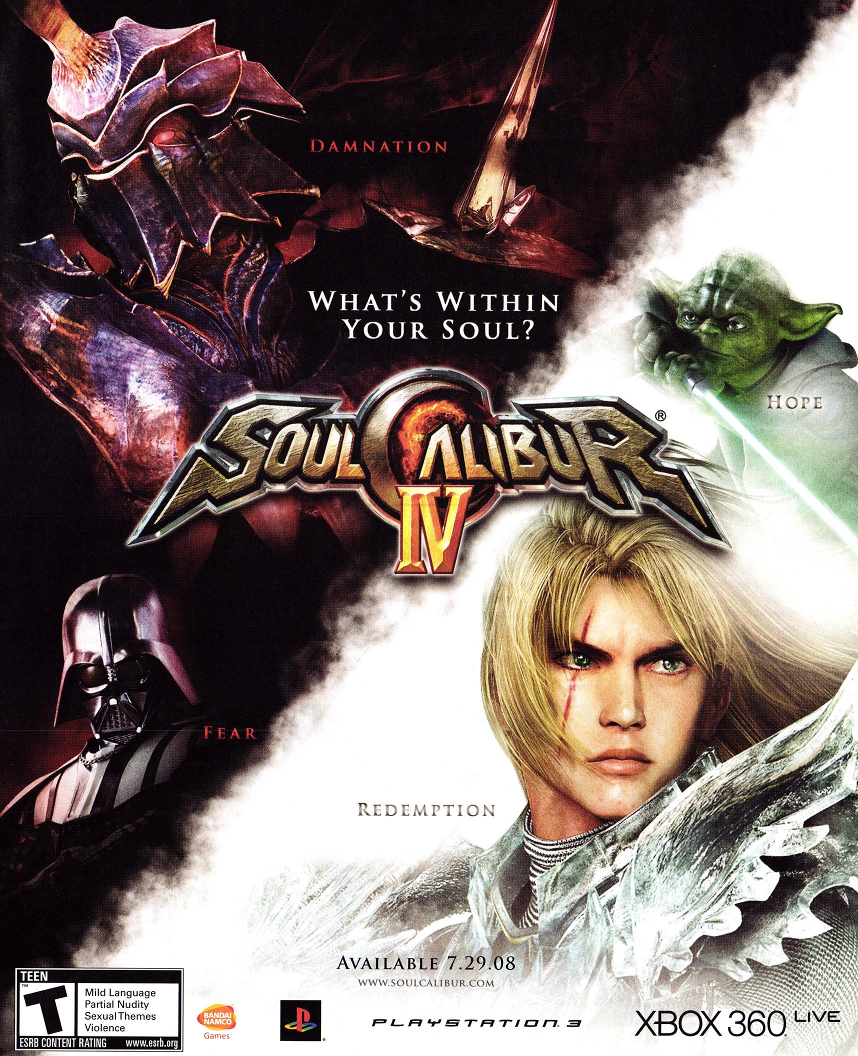
Number of days it took to reach 5 million PlayStation Network registered accounts worldwide. That number then doubled to 10 million in less than half the time.

5 million

Year to date through June, Sony has sold 5 million units of hardware in the PlayStation family in the U.S. alone: 1.8 million PS3s, 1.6 million PSPs, and 1.5 million PS2s.

23 billion

NPD's estimate for the overall game industry revenue in 2008.


DAMNATION
WHAT'S WITHIN YOUR SOUL?
HOPE
SOULCALIBUR®
IV
FEAR
REDEMPTION
AVAILABLE 7.29.08
WWW.SOULCALIBUR.COM
TEEN
T
Mild Language
Partial Nudity
Sexual Themes
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING
www.esrb.org
BANDAI NAMCO
Games
PLAYSTATION 3
XBOX 360 LIVE

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OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION INTERVIEW

SCOTT ROHDE

He brought us *MLB: The Show,* and for that he will always be welcome in our house

As former head of SCEA's San Diego studios, Scott Rohde oversaw the production of numerous sports games, including office fave *MLB: The Show.* Recently he was promoted to Vice President, Product Development for SCEA, and in that role will oversee all internal and external PlayStation game development in the U.S. A big job, for sure, at a fascinating time in the PlayStation family's life, so we quizzed the amiable exec about where the game portfolio is heading, and what we can expect in the months (and years) ahead.

PixelJunk Eden is part of a catalogue of original, exclusive PSN games where developers are encouraged to innovate.

PTOM: Where do you see the games portfolio today?

SR: We like to call this the year of the PlayStation because of the great breadth and depth. That's what we were hanging our hat on for the E3 press conference, and it's largely because there was just so much to show, we couldn't get it all in. Bottom line is people don't realize how large the worldwide studios operation is. We have a lot of games in development. The overall message is tons of breadth, tons of depth, and the momentum is just starting to kick in for us. We're always thinking five years ahead. This is a 10-year machine for us, and we're barely in year two.

PTOM: How is PSN fulfilling its role in the portfolio?

SR: PSN is a very important part of the business for us. We're really focusing on offering unique content you can't get anywhere else. We're not really interested in licensing what you can get elsewhere. It's about unique titles like *Flower, PixelJunk Eden,* that maybe wouldn't be done on Blu-ray, but we want to make these kind of innovative experiences. Then titles like *Quest for Booty* is a totally unique concept. We're focusing on letting developers innovate and we have a place where we can, say, do a mini *Ratchet* game and we have a place to put it.

PTOM: We've noticed some games showcased on multiple platforms looking that little bit better on PS3 *(Brothers in Arms,* for example), is that something we'll see more of in the months and years ahead?

SR: Your perception is correct. It's a technically superior machine, and developers have had to work through the complexities of it. But I know it's been said, but we really are just scratching the surface. Think of a title like *Madden,* for example, and the guys at Tiburon are very excited about the PS3 version.

PTOM: You showcased *M.A.G.* a 256-player multiplayer game. How the hell is that going to work?

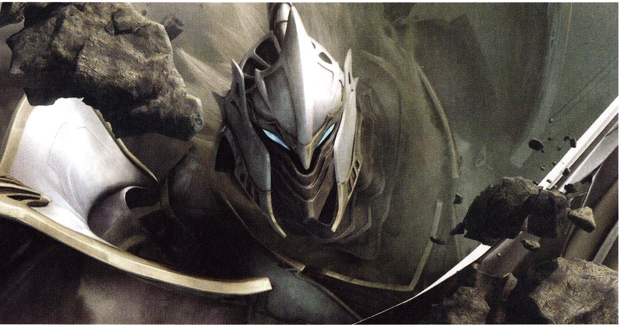
SR: It's funny, up at [developer] Zipper they already have tests working, so they'll hit all their hurdles. Gameplay-wise it's going to bring a new way of thinking to that genre. We showed how an experienced guy manages a squad of eight, and you're going to have to work as part of a team. It's a new way of thinking.

PTOM: With unique products from *Heavy Rain* to *Linger in Shadows* it seems like you're taking chances, trying a wide variety of options.

SR: I'm glad you brought up those two because they define how broad Sony is. If we're willing to try *Linger in Shadows,* you can be pretty sure we'll be willing to try almost anything. We'll always have products like that in the works. We'll start and stop a lot of projects along the way, but we'll try.

PTOM: What is the process for deciding what starts and what stops in development?

SR: We have a process where all the powers-that-be and creative



Just a teaser, but the artwork hints at an impressive visual feast with Level-5's *White Knight Story.*

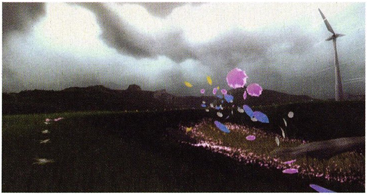
minds get together around once a month, to debate how they're going. Look at *Fat Princess* for creativity. It stole the show a couple of times in our start or stop meetings. We go through between six and 12 products every time.

PTOM: Right now it's not mandated that Trophies have to be built into games. Will it be made so in the future?

SR: It's just been introduced, and some games will go back in and add them, but not in all cases. Moving forward you'll see nearly 100-percent adoption with all products. It's funny because we saw a nice spike in *Super Stardust HD* just because of the Trophies.

PTOM: Deep integration of PSP with PS3 has been hinted at (such as when it was demonstrated that the PSP view could be the rear-view mirror view in F1) but not fully realized yet. Is it a pipedream?

SR: It's absolutely not a pipedream. I'm not ready to announce anything specific, but I will tell you that there are efforts underway that are far along to integrate those two machines. Think of the Video Download Service; it's not a rear-view mirror, but it's a vital integration of the two platforms.



***Flower* wows everyone who sees it, and PSN provides the ideal delivery method for this kind of experience.**

PTOM: How is it decided what functions are added through firmware first?

SR: There's a huge list, and we meet about the requirements, but it ultimately comes out of the hardware group in Japan.

PTOM: Where are the RPGs?

SR: You'll get an update at the Tokyo Game Show where you'll see what Level-5 is up to. But in general, at the start and stop meetings, if we identify areas like that that need filling we'll find those options. For MMOs, SOE gives us the opportunity to explore that area, and we'll absolutely look into more options in that space.

PTOM: And for the record, you need a pinball game!

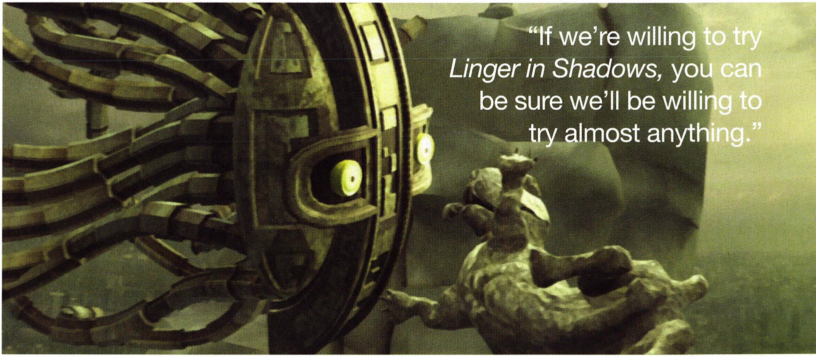
SR: It's funny, but you're not the first person to say that. Believe me, I hear ya!

Scott Rohde 411

AGE: Not quite 40
EDUCATION: 18 years in this crazy business...
IN A PREVIOUS LIFE: Center fielder for the San Diego Padres
FAVORITE CLASSIC GAME: *Cyberball*
FAVORITE CURRENT GAME: Splitscreen *Warhawk* online with the boys
FAMILY: Wife and two boys (ages 13 and 10)

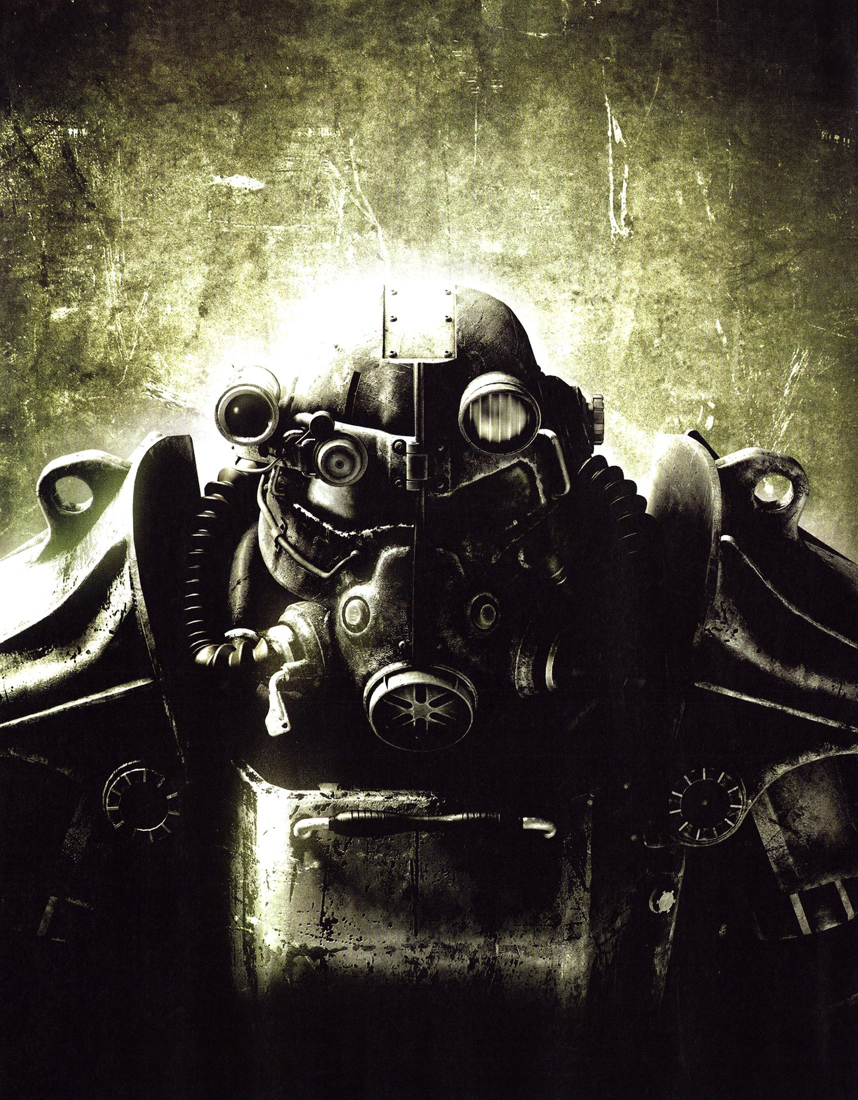
Is *White Knight Story* the next great PS3 RPG hope?

ユウリ
エルドア
斬る
レナード
ウィザード兵A
1
斬る
シールドバッシュ
つかむ



"If we're willing to try *Linger in Shadows,* you can be sure we'll be willing to try almost anything."

Is it a game or is it art? Or something else entirely? *Linger in Shadows* defies categorization.



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Fallout 3

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Games for Windows

XBOX 360 LIVE

PLAYSTATION 3

Bethesda
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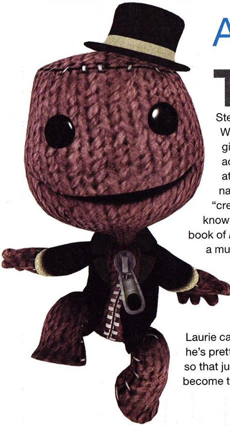
PlayStation Digest

Top Stories, Industry Bits, and Oddities

B.J. Blazkowicz is Back

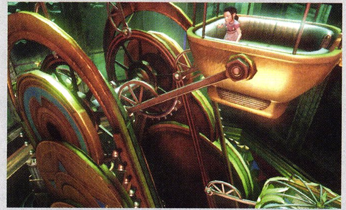
At Activision's "we're not at E3, honest" press conference, id Software's Todd Hollenshead reminded us that a new *Wolfenstein* was still in development with Raven Software. If you played the original shareware PC version back when it released in 1992, you should be psyched to see a next-gen offering that we expect to build on the multiplayer innovations that *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* brought to PC gamers a few years ago. Hollenshead confirmed that series hallmarks such as supernatural Nazi shenanigans will be central to the plot, and B.J. will shoot everything that moves. Good times.

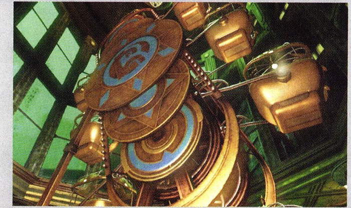


A Bit of Fry and Sackboy

The immensely talented British comedian, actor, writer, producer, and even occasional composer, Stephen Fry will narrate *LittleBigPlanet.* What that means isn't entirely clear, given the story progression of the actual game levels remains secret—but at a recent showing, we did hear Fry narrating a how-to segment during the "create" portion of the game. You may know Fry as the voice narrating the audio book of *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (itself a must-own) or from his recurring roles in the brilliant *Blackadder* comedy series (check your local PBS listings to catch this British comedy classic), or maybe his two-man comedy show with *House's* Hugh Laurie called *A Bit of Fry and Laurie*. Anyway, he's pretty much brilliant at everything he does, so that just means more good news for what's become the next most-anticipated PS3 release.

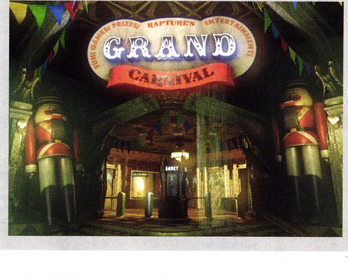
A star in the U.K., Stephen Fry is best known to Americans as, "that guy who knows Hugh Laurie." But soon, he'll be known as the voice of *LittleBigPlanet*.



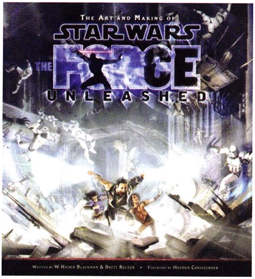


Little Sisters, Big Fun!

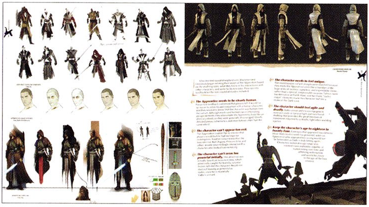
As if the promise of a (hopefully) perfect port of *BioShock*—complete with all the Xbox DLC, a new Survivor mode, and Trophies—isn't enough, we now have word that the PS3 release will support some all-new content in the form of stand-alone puzzle levels that will stretch your skills and knowledge of the tools at your disposal. In one level, for example, a Little Sister is stranded atop a stalled Ferris wheel, and you're tasked with getting her down. Problem is, the obvious solutions won't always work; you won't necessarily have any electro-shock plasmids available to jumpstart the carnival ride, so you'll have to explore the limited area thoroughly and come up with some creative solutions. The number of levels and the pricing of this DLC have yet to be determined, but it will include additional Trophies, which is reason enough to check them out later this year.

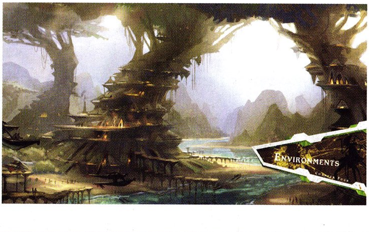


Book Wars:
The Brown-Nosing Unleashed


THE ART AND MAKING OF
STAR WARS
THE FORCE
UNLEASHED
WRITTEN BY W. HADEN BLACKMAN & BRETT RECTOR • FOREWORD BY HAYDEN CHRISTENSEN

Here at the PTOM offices, we're sure that the no book could ever be as good as the one our exceedingly handsome boss Rob Smith wrote about the history of Lucasarts (which comes out this holiday season, *cough*, can I get a 52" TV at my desk now?). But if you like pretty pictures (and who doesn't?), *The Art and Making of Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* might tide you over until you can get your hands on Rob's stellar, sure to be ground-breaking, Nobel Prize–caliber book *(ahem*, an espresso machine might be nice, too). Written by W. Haden Blackman and Brett Rector (Blackman is the game's Project Lead), *Force* features over 300 pieces of concept art and more than 150 pages of insight about how the game was made, including peeks at scrapped game concepts and character model evolution. At $29.95 (with extra bonuses like character cards), it's one of the better game art books we've seen—but even so, it can't compare with the miracle that Rob's book is sure to be. (Can I have two months off for Thanksgiving?)

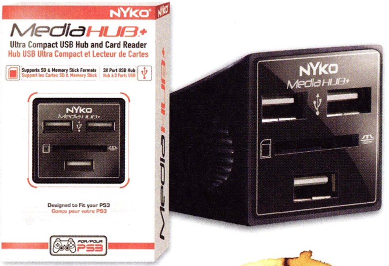




NYKO
MediaHUB

Hubba Hubba (Media) Hubba

Nyko's new Media Hub for the PS3 can't fix your restricted backward compatibility issues, but it'll solve another pressing problem that owners of the 40GB PS3 face: limited USB slots. The Media Hub plugs into one of your PS3's USB slots (leaving the other one open and free to use) and offers three additional slots as well as a media card reader that supports both SD cards and Memory Sticks. It fits right in fairly elegantly (except for the bold Nyko logo right in front), with no wires or batteries needed.

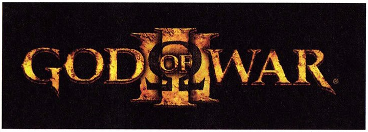

NYKO
MediaHUB+
Ultra Compact USB Hub and Card Reader
Hub USB Ultra Compact et Lecteur de Cartes
Supports SD & Memory Stick Formats
Support les Cartes SD & Memory Stick
3X Port USB Hub
Hub à 3 Ports USB
Designed to Fit your PS3
Conçu pour votre PS3
FOR/POUR PS3
NYKO
MediaHUB+

TO GO WITH YOUR MORNING COFFEE...

News junkies will soon be able to get their fix right on their consoles thanks to the recently announced "Life with PlayStation" program. News and weather feeds from all around the world will populate a real-time satellite image of Earth, letting you browse world events while still surfing the net, listening to custom soundtracks, and Folding@home. We expect it to drop within the next few months.

GOD OF WAR III: ANNOUNCED

Whodda thunk it...



TOP10LIST

What we're playing, watching, reading, and consuming this month. C'mon, let's turn this economy around!

De Niro's Game | Book | $18
According to Rob, if the *Literary Review* says of a book that "writing really cannot get much better" it's probably worth reading. Rawi Hage's novel of life in war torn Beirut, though no laugh-a-minute, is still a fast-paced, incredibly vivid description of an experience you would hope to never have. Serious subject matter, serious writing. Amazing stuff.

Trophies | PSN | Free
As if there was any doubt, the concept of getting something—even digital icons representing trophies—for playing games will provide gamers with endless excuses to keep going back for more. Finally, with the 2.41 firmware release we're able to get trophies, and that alone caused Rob to spend way more time than is really explainable in the void of space with *Super Stardust HD*. You'll always remember your first.

Andrew Jackson Jihad | Music | $8
Sure, acoustic folk-punk duos from Arizona are a dime-a-dozen these days (um...okay), but Scott seems to think these guys are particularly noteworthy. And with beautifully awkward and occasionally hilarious lyrics about everything from life and love to meat and cigarettes, it's actually not too hard to see why. Pick up *People Who Can Eat People Are the Luckiest People In the World* to check them out.

RC Cola | Beverage | $1
Somewhere between the acerbic bite of Coca-Cola and the syrupy sweetness of Pepsi lies the perfect blend of cola flavors: Royal Crown Cola. It might just be the lack of corporate evil that makes it taste so great, but whatever the reason, Scott claims that RC is just plain better than those other two. Pick up a can or bottle and see for yourself!

MyGameMug | Matchtest | Free
Teresa's a total sucker for personality tests, especially the Myers-Briggs. She could spend hours self-analyzing ("Introvert or extrovert? Thinker or feeler? Hmm!") So when her friend sent her a link (www.mygamemug.com/matchtest.php) to a gamer version of the Myers-Briggs personality test, she ate it up. She's a proud DSFV ("The Helping Hand")...and a total geek.

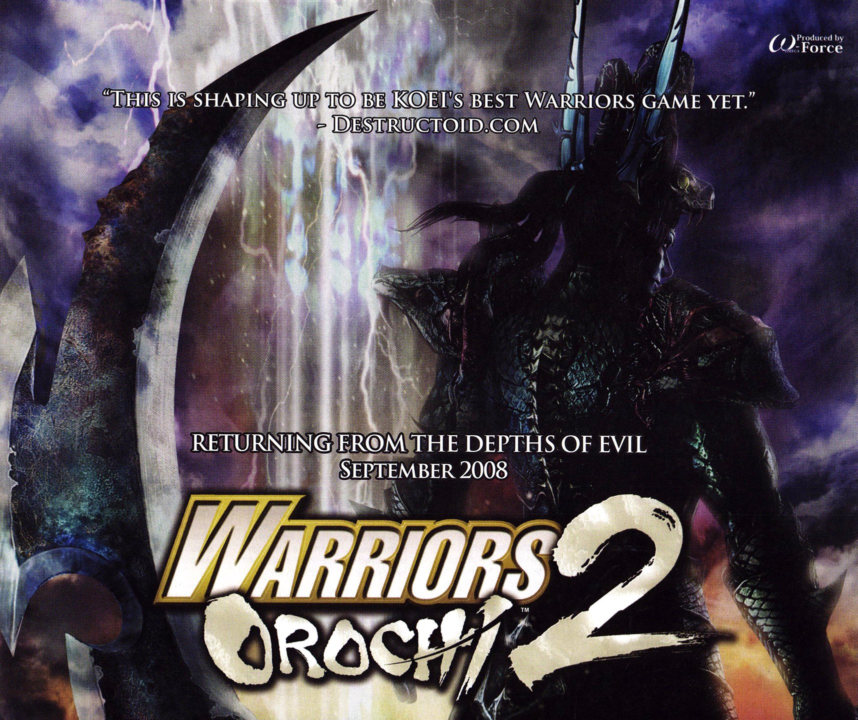
MLS Official Match Ball | Sports Suff | $70
Ken's purchased a new soccer ball to kick around while he waits for editors to get their late copy in. When he told us how much he paid for his new toy, we almost choked on our Emerald Cocoa Roast Almonds. When he told us that it would have cost $130 if he bought this year's model, we proceeded to spit out almond chunks. Except for Rob, who thought the expenditure perfectly reasonable.

Butterfish | Seafood | $28 at Roy's
Gary isn't very fond of fish. He finds the notion of fish sort of…fishy. But there's one fish dish that Gary will order whenever he can: the Hawaiian-style Misoyaki Butterfish from Roy's. It's the most delish fish dish ever!

Tatuaje Black | Cigar | $13
Rarer than a Fuente Fuente OpusX, tougher to find than illegal Cuban cigars, the Tatuaje Black is brand-founder Pete Johnson's personal cigar, and he's not selling a whole lot of them. Rich, peppery, and complex, the cigar has become an obsession for Gary. If any reader has a stash, you know where to send them!

Avatar: The Last Airbender | Nickelodeon/DVD | Free/$$$
Proving that Rob's not the only PTOMer who can jump on a bandwagon long after it's embarked, Roger is just now discovering the engrossing tale of young Aang and his friends as they face-off against the evil Fire Nation. Mixing martial arts with thought-provoking mysticism, *Avatar* can swing between epic combat, introspective poignancy, and slapstick humor—all in a single episode.

Street Dog | Food | $3
Basking in the afterglow of The Who's resplendent performance at the *Rock Band 2* party during E3, Roger embarked on his walk back to his hotel with a replenished soul, but an empty stomach. On a nearby street corner, he encountered the alluring aroma of grilled onions and hot dogs. With a mysterious sauce topping off the mystery meat (man, that sounds wrong), Roger experienced culinary nirvana. Yes, this is how hot dogs taste in heaven.



"THIS IS SHAPING UP TO BE KOEI'S BEST WARRIORS GAME YET."
- DESTRUCTOID.COM

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Over 90 playable characters from the DYNASTY WARRIORS® and SAMURAI WARRIORS® series, plus all-new characters.

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TEEN
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Violence
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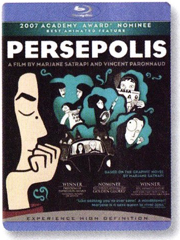
30th

KOEI

Blu-ray Central

Don't say we didn't warn you about *Postal*. Er...

This month: A superb and offbeat American comedy made by a Frenchman, non-NBC must-see TV, the Horror Hall of Mediocrity, brilliant and tastless gore, and an eclectic mix of other random offerings!


2007 ACADEMY AWARD NOMINEE
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE
PERSEPOLIS
A FILM BY MARJANE SATRAPI AND VINCENT PARONNAUD
EXPERIENCE HIGH DEFINITION

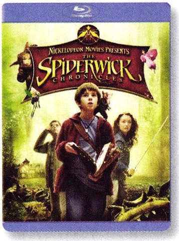
Persepolis

PRICE: $38.96 **RATED:** PG-13

| MOVIE | *Persepolis* is the animated story of an Iranian woman's journey to adulthood; and for anyone who cares enough to see life from the perspective of other cultures, this is required viewing. Poignant, funny, and tragic, the movie gives you more history on what is, to a U.S. perspective, a completely misunderstood society than you're likely to find anywhere else.

| EXTRAS | The extras aren't astounding. A reasonably insightful Cannes press conference, commentary on select scenes, and some shorts on translating the original graphic novel to film round out the offering.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★


NICKELODEON MOVIES PRESENTS
THE SPIDERWICK CHRONICLES

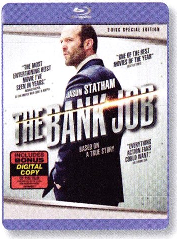
The Spiderwick Chronicles

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** PG

| MOVIE | The latest in the seemingly endless line of kid's fantasy books turned into movies, *The Spiderwick Chronicles* is surprisingly good, with a nicely dark sensibility to it and fun CGI creatures.

| EXTRAS | The extras are essentially geared to youngsters as well, with plenty of background on the world of Spiderwick, and overall, this is a better than average Blu-ray kid's flick.

MOVIE ★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★


2-DISC SPECIAL EDITION
"THE MOST ENTERTAINING HEIST MOVIE I'VE SEEN IN YEARS."
"ONE OF THE BEST MOVIES OF THE YEAR"
JASON STATHAM
THE BANK JOB
BASED ON A TRUE STORY
"EVERYTHING ACTION FANS COULD WANT."
INCLUDES BONUS DIGITAL COPY

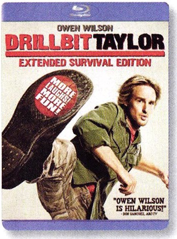
The Bank Job

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | A victim of terrible marketing, *The Bank Job* is not, in fact, a sequel (or in any way related) to *The Italian Job*. This is a much grimmer heist movie based on real-life events in early '70s London, with a hefty serving of sex, violence, and racial and political tension. The result is a surprisingly tense thriller, with some excellent action and humor thrown in at regular intervals.

| EXTRAS | The 7.1 audio is powerful, the picture looks great, the commentary is engaging, and there are plenty of extras, including some fascinating facts on the actual crime.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★½


OWEN WILSON
DRILLBIT TAYLOR
EXTENDED SURVIVAL EDITION
MORE LAUGHS! MORE FUN!
"OWEN WILSON IS HILARIOUS!"

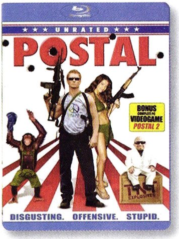
Drillbit Taylor

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** UNRATED

| MOVIE | While this is definitely no *Superbad,* it's not super bad either. Although Owen Wilson's usual schtick feels tired here, much of this comedy about three high school freshman nerds seeking protection from bullies feels authentically traumatic. There are also enough genuinely funny moments here to make it worth a rental.

| EXTRAS | All the extras are provided in HD: An array of extended and deleted scenes, a gag reel, a humorous chat with the writers, and fun commentary. The extended, unrated version of the movie doesn't add much as the content is still far tamer than most of its ilk.

MOVIE ★★½
EXTRAS ★★½


UNRATED
POSTAL
BONUS COMPLETE PC VIDEOGAME POSTAL 2
DISGUSTING. OFFENSIVE. STUPID.

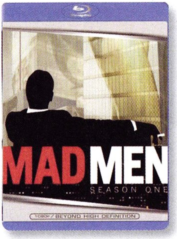
Postal

PRICE: $34.99 **RATED:** NOT RATED

| MOVIE | It opens with a variant on the brilliant satire employed by *The Onion* in its first response to the 9/11 World Trade Center attack (the whole "what happened to the virgins?" riff when the bombers found themselves in hell). It follows up with a window washer on one of the towers as the plane approaches. If you're still reading, maybe the rest of *Postal* won't be as offensive (or plain puerile) as it was to most reviewers upon first release. In a class by itself, we're unable to assign a rating to *Postal* beyond this oxymoronic assessment: Brilliantly tasteless.

| EXTRAS | Nobody needs any more Vern Troyer, so that extra video is a dud. "Raging Boll" showcases the director's pugilistic skills as he trades blows with select movie critics. And the full *Postal 2* PC game is included on the second disc of the DVD version. At least its system specs mean it can run on most computers!

MOVIE ABSTAIN
EXTRAS ABSTAIN


MAD MEN
SEASON ONE
1080P / BEYOND HIGH DEFINITION

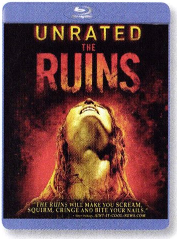
Mad Men Season 1

PRICE: $49.99 **RATED:** NOT RATED

| MOVIE | HBO and Showtime usually top the list when you consider the best networks for drama on TV yet, of all channels, AMC has snuck in *Mad Men,* a show that can rival anything premium channels have to offer, even without gratuitous sex and profanity. Starting out slow, a show about 1960s-era ad men in Manhattan seems tame, yet the characters are deep and incredibly developed, the story fascinating, and the setting is so counter to today's obsession with political correctness that it might as well be an alien planet.

| EXTRAS | The presentation is terrific as well, which is somewhat ironic considering that AMC isn't actually broadcasting in HD through a lot of carriers. The extras offer plenty of behind the scenes info, covering all aspects of the production—and these shorts are surprisingly interesting. There's even commentary for all 13 episodes that provides yet more insight.

MOVIE ★★★★½
EXTRAS ★★★½


UNRATED
THE RUINS
"THE RUINS WILL MAKE YOU SCREAM, SQUIRM, CRINGE AND BITE YOUR NAILS."
AINT-IT-COOL-NEWS.COM

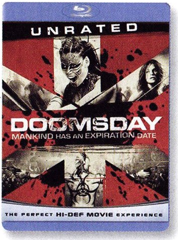
The Ruins

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** UNRATED

| MOVIE | For a movie that's basically about the worst case of poison ivy ever, *The Ruins* is a remarkably effective thriller. The ending, however, is the same gloomy cliché that we've come to expect from movies like this: *The Descent, The Cave,* and the endless stream of other horror drivel. Still, *The Ruins* delivers genuine scares, and the monstrous plant proves a horrific antagonist.

| EXTRAS | This is, of course, the unrated, even bleaker version, and there are a couple other endings as well, in addition to deleted scenes, and some decent making-of featurettes. The commentary isn't bad either if you're eager to get more behind the scenes. Rounding the package out is a great presentation—the movie looks great, but the audio is especially impressive.

MOVIE ★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★


UNRATED
DOOMSDAY
MANKIND HAS AN EXPIRATION DATE
THE PERFECT HI-DEF MOVIE EXPERIENCE

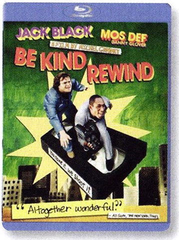
Doomsday

PRICE: $39.98 **RATED:** NOT RATED

| MOVIE | A fun, violent amalgamation of *Mad Max, 28 Days Later,* with a little *Lord of the Rings* and Ingmar Bergman thrown in for good measure, director Neil Marshall's follow-up to his depressing monster cave movie, *The Descent,* is as entertaining as it is absurd. Full of hot girls, built guys, and completely over-the-top acting, there's plenty of gore and action to keep B-movie lovers in seventh heaven.

| EXTRAS | As Universal's first new release, the movie looks and sounds as great as it should. The extras are solid as well, with plenty of background info on the movie's setting and virus, and an entertaining commentary track from the director and several cast members.

MOVIE ★★★
EXTRAS ★★★★


JACK BLACK
MOS DEF
DANNY GLOVER
A FILM BY MICHEL GONDRY
BE KIND REWIND
"Altogether wonderful!"

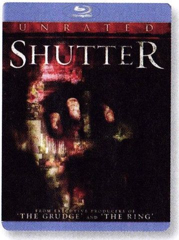
Be Kind Rewind

PRICE: $35.99 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | Michel Gondry first made waves in the U.S. with his brilliantly intelligent and creative look at difficult relationships in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind.* With *Be Kind Rewind* he's established himself as one the best writer/directors of our era. Not merely a superb comedy of a bumbling video store clerk and his idiot friend remaking big movies on the cheap, this is, like the best classic French cinema, a telling story of human nature and city life. Jack Black and Mos Def are pitch perfect, and if you like intelligent comedy with plenty of slapstick and heart, this is easily one of the best movies you'll see all year.

| EXTRAS | The extras are generally good featurettes about the actors, the film (and the films within the films), and the New Jersey setting. What's disappointing is the lack of director and cast commentary, which would have been especially welcome.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★


UNRATED
SHUTTER
FROM EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS OF 'THE GRUDGE' AND 'THE RING'

Shutter

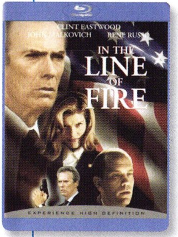
PRICE: $39.98 **RATED:** UNRATED

| MOVIE | And yet another American remake of a Japanese horror flick… *Shutter,* like most of these, has a great concept—seeing the dead in photos—yet seems to have no idea what to do beyond that. On the plus side, the female lead is feisty, but the plot is otherwise hackneyed; there's hardly anything even creepy here, let alone scary; and the look of the movie is more pedestrian than it should be considering all the ghostly elements at the director's disposal.

| EXTRAS | The Blu-ray looks and sounds excellent, though, and there's a surprising amount of extras. Admittedly, most of these shorts focus on either the Japanese-ness of the movie, or are laughably dramatic bits on how ghosts in photos are real.

MOVIE ★★
EXTRAS ★★★

CINEMA RETRO


CLINT EASTWOOD
JOHN MALKOVICH
RENE RUSSO
IN THE LINE OF FIRE
EXPERIENCE HIGH DEFINITION

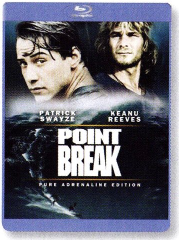
In the Line of Fire

PRICE: $28.95 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | Clint Eastwood has managed to have as much impact as an actor in his twilight years as he did early on, and great movies like *In the Line of Fire* are why. Easily Wolfgang Peterson's best American movie (and second best, period, next to *Das Boot*), the cat and mouse plot of Secret Service agent Frank Horrigan (Eastwood) and a would-be presidential assassin (freakishly played by John Malkovich) is thrilling, fun, and smart. The Blu-ray transfer is excellent as well.

| EXTRAS | A reasonable amount of extras pad the rest of the disc, with interesting anecdotal commentary from Peterson, several making-of shorts, deleted scenes, and a documentary about actual secret service agents.

MOVIE ★★★★
EXTRAS ★★★½


PATRICK SWAYZE
KEANU REEVES
POINT BREAK
PURE ADRENALINE EDITION

Point Break

PRICE: $39.98 **RATED:** R

| MOVIE | Somehow, *Point Break* has managed to turn itself into a cult classic. This is especially perplexing watching the movie now—some 17 years later—because it's absolutely awful. Keanu Reeves puts in what is probably the worst acting job of his career, the plot is nonsense, the dialogue painful, and even the action scenes are mediocre. On the bright side, if you do like this smoldering pile of cinematic trash, the Blu-ray transfer is pretty damn good.

| EXTRAS | There's little in the way of special features here. Some old featurettes and deleted scenes, trailers, and a photo gallery round out a generally broken release.

MOVIE ★
EXTRAS ★★

TERMINATOR

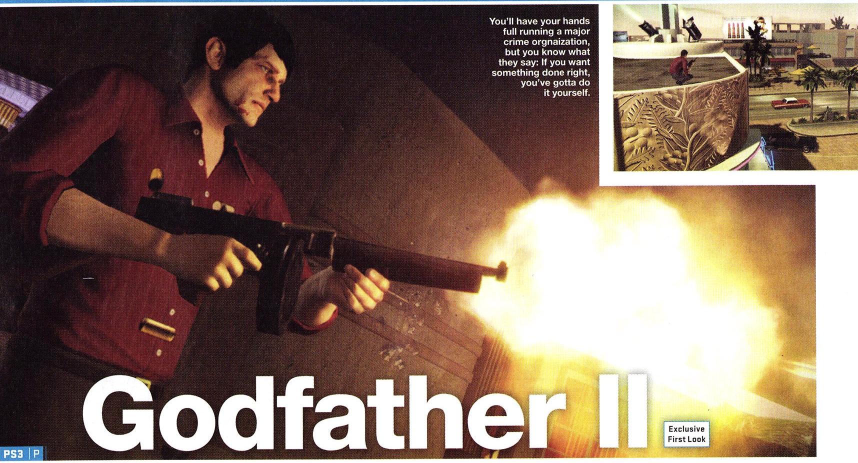
THE SARAH CONNOR CHRONICLES

MONDAY
SEPT 8 **FOX**

FROM J. J. ABRAMS
ALEX KURTZMAN & ROBERTO ORCI

FRINGE

TUESDAY
SEPT 9
FOX



You'll have your hands full running a major crime orgnaization, but you know what they say: If you want something done right, you've gotta do it yourself.

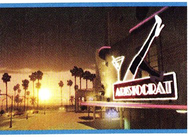
Godfather II

PS3 | P

Exclusive First Look

Putting the "organized" back in "organized crime"

PS3 GENRE: Action/strategy AVAILABLE: 2009 PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: EA Redwood Shores

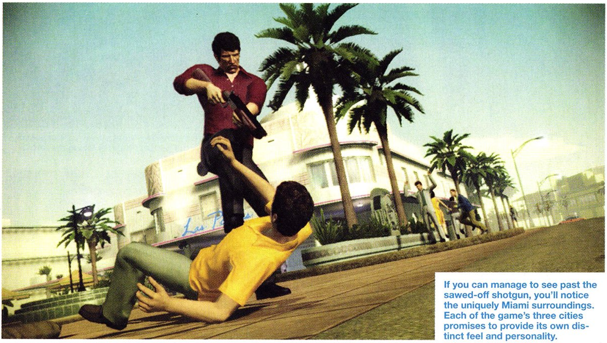


"Act like a mobster, think like the Don." Hell of a catch phrase, isn't it? I generally try to avoid parroting the carefully scripted buzz phrases recited in game demos, but it really is the most succinct description of the direction taken with *Godfather II.* All the open-world action of the first game remains, but an entirely new and surprisingly deep layer of strategy has been added for a more fully-realized organized crime experience. And while you don't play as Michael Corleone, you do wield all the powers of a mob boss within the context of the greatest movie sequel ever made.

The game opens in Cuba at Hyman Roth's birthday party where you (an unnamed associate who does not appear in the films) are hanging out on a balcony with Hyman, Michael, and Fredo Corleone. Also present is your boss Aldo Trapani, the first game's protagonist, who is effectively ruler of New York City. Unfortunately, some Cuban revolutionaries have decided to crash the party, and you and your entourage of high-ranking mobsters must flee amid the chaos. Aldo, sadly, doesn't make it, and Michael promotes you to run New York City for the Corleone family.

While this means that you're technically working for the Corleones, you're actually very much in charge. For starters, you run your own family, which you can manage and customize using a very family-tree–looking menu screen. You can choose to promote or dismiss members; spend money to upgrade their basic attributes like health and fighting ability; and pay for extra training, which will grant the recipient special skills such as cutting phone lines or setting explosives. Naturally, as you gain more money and power, your family will grow. Also, each member of your crew has a distinct personality, which should affect the methods you choose to develop your family.

Beyond serving as head coach to an army of goons, your job as the Corleone's kingpin is to take over the crime rings in each of three cities—New York, Miami, and somewhere in Cuba—and thereby bankrupt or otherwise eliminate all the other families. So unlike the first game—in which the main story and



If you can manage to see past the sawed-off shotgun, you'll notice the uniquely Miami surroundings. Each of the game's three cities promises to provide its own distinct feel and personality.

Live the Movie?

As you might have guessed from your role as the new king of New York, *Godfather II* the game is not a linear re-telling of the movie. Rather, the developers are "leveraging" the story, which I'm guessing means that the plotlines of the movie and the game run concurrently and could potentially intertwine. After all, "most of the original actors" are lending their voices to the project, or so the developers explain.

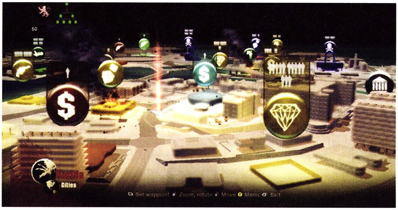
the extortion side missions were essentially unrelated—the story here drives your conquest of local "legitimate businesses." As a result, the entire process has become far more complex and strategic.

Every crime ring consists of four different rackets, each in a different location and potentially owned by any of the crime families. Gaining control of a single racket boosts your cash flow and weakens the other family, but gaining all four earns you a monopoly, generating an in-game perk based on the type of crime ring you've acquired (like, say, bullet-proof vests for all the members of your family when you take over a gunrunning ring). However, all the other families pursue the exact same goal as you and will actively try to capture your rackets, forcing decisions on allocating your resources to the defense of any given business.

Strategy doesn't stop at choosing the businesses to take over though; deciding how to most effectively execute those strategies is key. For instance, during my demo, the developers chose to capture a heavily-fortified oil refinery, the final racket of a gunrunning ring. Rather than kicking down the front gate, we went to a corrupt DA who asked us to smash up a restaurant so he could frame someone. In exchange, we asked him to arrest a member of the oil refinery-owning family to weaken their defenses. Plus, in the process of completing the mission, we managed to capture the diner as a front, gun down a made-man from another family, and escape unharmed while two members of the other family were arrested. In this way, the action portion of the game directly impacts your strategy.

Godfather II is still a car-jacking, gut-punching, shotgun-blasting action game. The "Black Hand" extortion system from the first game returns, only now most of the controls have moved from the analog stick to the triggers, which serve as your left and right fists. You can strangle, headbutt, and initiate all kinds of other cringe-inducing attacks, including contextually sensitive extortion techniques like slamming someone's head into a counter. The impact of these moves is visceral and the emphasis on combos could prove more rewarding than the combat systems of similar titles. Firearm targeting offers both lock-on and free-aim modes and, of course, you can still off anyone with any number of brutal executions.

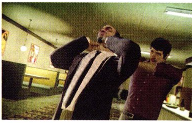
In the increasingly crowded world of sandbox crime games, *Godfather II* has reinvented itself with depth and panache, and we're hoping the team executes on its own ambitious design plans. Scott Butterworth



The Best Laid Plans

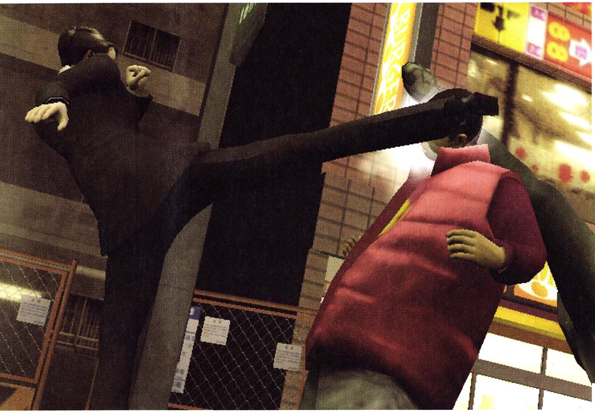
The real core of the game's strategy component is the "Don's View." This is basically a semi-interactive 3D map of the game world that provides you with all the essential information you need about a city's various businesses, including the type of racket it represents, which family it belongs to, and how many men are guarding it. The developers estimate that you'll spend about 25-percent of the game strategizing here, though you can opt to spend far more or less time on it than that if you wish.

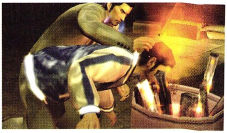
As with most open-world crime games, missions can be completed in any number of different ways.



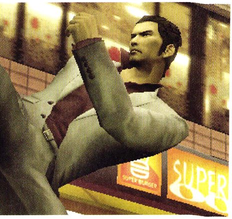
Much like *GTA IV*, gameplay moves seamlessly into and out of buildings. Strangle without sunburn!

Basic real-time squad controls play an important roll in the action portion of the game.





Context-sensitive "Heat moves" are especially brutal, but perhaps Kiryu is taking the term a bit too literally.



Punishing street thugs for their insolence is a cornerstone of *Yakuza* gameplay.

The Yakuza ritual of *Yubitsume* is a form of penance or apology where the tip of the transgressor's left pinky is severed and presented to his boss.

Yakuza 2

Hands-On Preview

Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer

PS2 AVAILABLE: September GENRE: Action Adventure PUBLISHER: Sega DEVELOPER: Sega Studios

Considering the best-seller status of the *Yakuza* franchise in Japan, it's apparent that you don't have to be a bloodthirsty American *gaijin* to appreciate the violent, seamy underworld of gangsters. It's the kind of universal human trait that inspires hope for our species—*Grand Theft Auto*...*Yakuza*...at the end of the day, we're all just one big, happy crime family.

While the *Yakuza* series can't match *GTA IV* for pure next-gen scale and gameplay grandeur, the storyline is arguably more engaging and serves as the backbone of this enticing new PS2 game. The first *Yakuza* game introduced us to Kazuma Kiryu, a former Yakuza member trying to piece his life together after a 10-year prison stint, only to be sucked back into the life as he tries to prevent an all-out gang war. *Yakuza 2* picks up Kiryu's story one year later with his severely-weakened former clan seeking his assistance in negotiating a peace with their powerful rivals. The entire story arc is filled with intrigue and betrayal and plot twists are flying mere minutes into the game.

But it's the sprawling recreations of the Tokyo and Osaka nightlife districts where the core gameplay experience begins to reveal itself. An RPG-ish mixture of free-roaming exploration and character interaction, you'll need to converse with a broad spectrum of people, explore shops and nightspots, and engage in a fair share of random street fights in order to develop skills, acquire funds, and uncover the story cues necessary to advance the plot.

Initially, the numerous hand-to-hand brawls are satisfying—especially when utilizing the powered-up Heat moves which reward you with brutal context-specific animations. But the fight control system does seem to skew towards button-mashing over skillful execution, which might make combat seem tedious and repetitious over the course of the game. However, a subsequent showdown with a rival crew at the Yakuza peace conference had an epic *Kill Bill*-like pace and scale to the combat, indicating there may be more depth to the system to be uncovered.

Mini-games are also littered liberally throughout the world. Should you desire, you can spend more time playing arcade games, slot machines, mah jong, bowling, golf, or hitting the batting cage than working your way through the central plot line.

While none of *Yakuza 2's* disparate gameplay elements are revolutionary in their own right, the game's blend of these components with a gripping story should make for a unique experience that PS2 owners can start getting excited about.

Roger Burchill

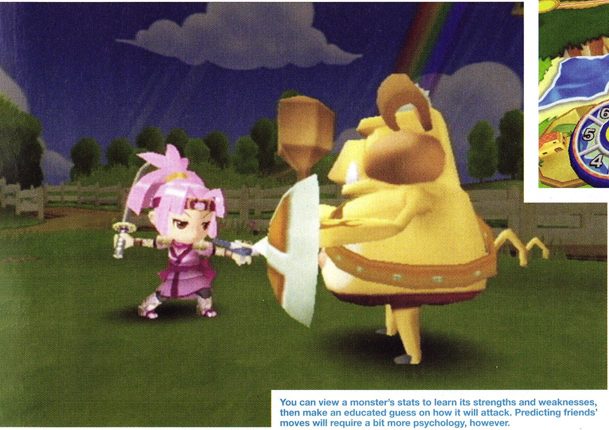
PS2 | P

The Next-Gen of Yakuza

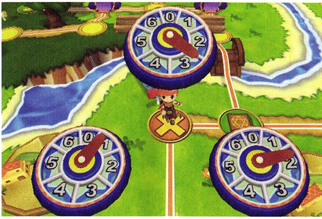
YAKUZA: KENZAN!
The third installment in the *Yakuza* franchise, and the first on the PS3, *Yakuza: Kenzan!* released in Japan this past March. *Kenzan!* is essentially a series spin-off, set in the year 1605 during Japan's Edo period. Wow, that's *really* OG!

YAKUZA 3
The fourth game in the *Yakuza* series, *Yakuza 3* picks up where *Yakuza 2* leaves off and continues Kazuma Kiryu's storyline. The game is currently in development and slated for release in Japan in Spring 2009.

While there's been no confirmation of a U.S. release for either PS3 game, *Yakuza's* immersive story and gameplay make a compelling argument for a Stateside appearance. But strong U.S. *Yakuza 2* sales wouldn't hurt either.



You can view a monster's stats to learn its strengths and weaknesses, then make an educated guess on how it will attack. Predicting friends' moves will require a bit more psychology, however.



Fights don't just occur on the battlefield. Use overmap abilities to attack your opponents, inflict status ailments, steal items, and even frame friends for your own misdeeds.

Think this looks painful? It's nothing compared to the real-life fistfight that almost broke out during our demo!

Dokapon Kingdom

Dash for the cash in this roleplaying party game

PS2 **AVAILABLE:** October **GENRE:** Party RPG **PUBLISHER:** Atlus **DEVELOPER:** Sting

Let's face it: Being a console RPG fan can be lonely sometimes. Sitting quietly in your darkened living room, exploring massive worlds all by yourself...no matter how big your in-game party is, it's just not the same as being with, y'know, real people.

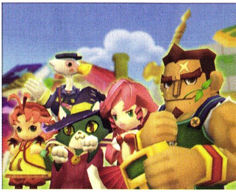
To fill the multiplayer void in our turn-taking hearts, Atlus is bringing us *Dokapon Kingdom,* a four-player competitive RPG with the facade of a party game. The action plays out across a board-game style overmap, with friends beating the crap out of each other over a simple goal: earn as much money as possible.

Curiously, you'll find no heroic quests here. Plain and simple, the King of Dokapon wants cold, hard cash—and he's willing to pimp out his daughter Penny to whoever can earn him the fattest chunk of dough. The story is broken into eight chapters, each with a specific goal that your friends and you fight tooth and nail to accomplish first. In the chapter we played, the first part was an every-man-for-himself race for a piggy bank, with each player blasting nearby characters with magic attacks and stealthily pilfering items from unwary friends. After one of us nabbed the bank, however, the dynamic totally changed as the remaining three players teamed up to stop the bank-holder from making it back to the king in one piece.

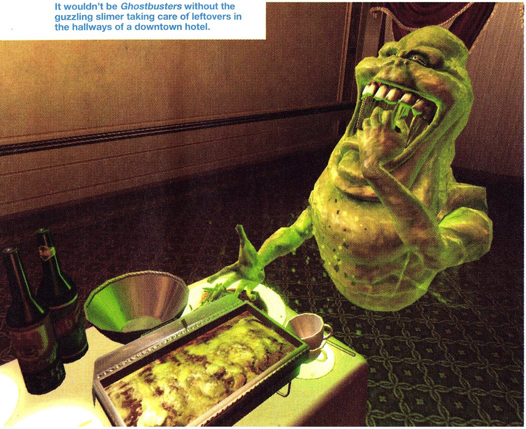
You take turns moving across the board, earning money by capturing unclaimed cities, looting from other players, and usurping territory by engaging monsters and friends alike in turn-based rock-paper-scissors-style combat. Characters level up just like a standard RPG, and allocate stat boosts with each earned level. The 12 character classes have unique abilities, like magicians who can cast spells twice per turn and thieves who can steal items from anyone they pass on the board. And of course, the game has a strategic turn-based battle system, along with tons of items and equipment to hoard.

We expect it to take about 16 hours to complete the full game, which is a significant commitment, but the AI will fill in for any dead-beats who bail out early. Of course, that somewhat defeats the purpose of countering the loneliness of being a hardcore RPG fan—after all, *Dokapon* might be the stuff to build lasting friendships over...or tear them down completely.

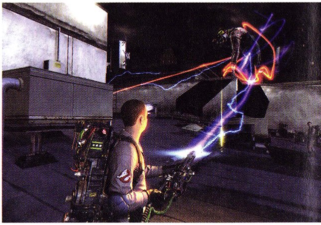
Carolyn Gudmundson



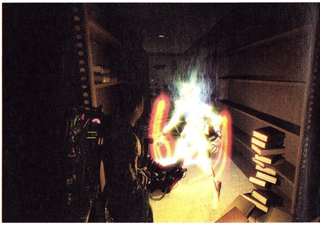
Note the mischievous feline in the witch's hat. If you played *Tsugunai: Atonement* for PS2, you know Atlus can bring it with the talking cat humor.



It wouldn't be *Ghostbusters* without the guzzling slimer taking care of leftovers in the hallways of a downtown hotel.



As part of the squad you'll get help from the other fellas to snag ghosts, shake and slam them dizzy, then capture them.



Books will fly off the shelves in the library, courtesy of the paranormal shenanigans of these ghostly visions.

Ghostbusters

Hands-On Preview

There's nothing like getting slimed on your first day of work

PS3 | P

PS3 AVAILABLE: October GENRE: Action Adventure PUBLISHER: Sierra DEVELOPER: Terminal Reality

Were you born in the '80s and missed what "old folks" might call the *Ghostbusters* phenomenon? Now's the time to rectify this injustice by renting the movie as preparation for the new *Ghostbusters* game, set right after the events of the original. At least if you're new to the franchise you'll be in the same shoes as the newest recruit to the Ghostbusters squad.

Original cast members Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis have, according to the developers, championed the game production and cajoled the other actors to come on board. Plus, they crafted an original story that we fully expect to retain the same ghostly shenanigans and humor as the seminal movies. Many of the levels will surely tug at the memories of fans of the movies as they recreate various familiar locations. In our hands-on demo, one mission involved recapturing the infamous ghost librarian from the popular library scene. The library itself is spacious, providing plenty of room to fight ghosts as well as explore to find prizes that will decorate your home base at the firehouse.

From the moment we started our brief play test, the action and story weren't interrupted by cutscenes. The original actors, all voicing their big-screen characters, will explain the story and what you should do next. When the ghosts show up these characters will help, or yell at you if you mess up.

The developers chose not to use a HUD display, in favor of a more intuitive method of determining the state of your health and gear. All equipment will be visible on-person, and will show signs of their condition. Your health is indicated by a clear field of vision if you're fine to a grim shade of blurry red if you're getting battered (or slimed).

When the search for paranormal activity leads to no result, it helps to switch from third-person to first-person view. This allows you to put on your PKE goggles, which provide special sleuthing abilities. You'll be able to spot spectral residue and if a ghost shows up, you'll collect valuable data on them. The actual ghost-capturing action is handled almost like a fishing simulation. When in the presence of a dangerous ghost, you have to catch 'em in the stream, pound them on any surface (using optional Sixaxis motion, shaking the controller up and down) until they're dizzy, and then set the trap underneath them. With all that tugging and reeling, snagging a ghost is like capturing that big prize catch.

The visuals already look impressive. The lighting effects and sound of the shooting proton streams is as exciting to see as the destruction it causes. Scorch marks scar surfaces and slowly burning embers drift across each ghost battle scene. If you're chasing ghosts through a level (or just messing around with the destructible pieces of the terrain) every material in your path gets a whooping: tables splinter, cinder and granite crumble, and even the pages of individual books are ripped from their binding. Remember, the city will pay for the damages and you get paid for your services, so have fun!

It's great to see the PS3 get an injection of '80s culture (y'know, for the old folks), and fans and gamers will share a unique *Ghostbusters* experience. As our anticipation for the holiday release grows, we're still waiting confirmation on the most pressing *Ghostbusters* questions: Will Zuul be back to wreck New York City? Will the game lead to an actual movie sequel? It's been almost 20 years and Indiana Jones proved he can do it…sort of. Carlos Ruiz

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If you only have, say, seven friends for your team, AI players can fill the other three spots. Similarly, if a player drops out mid-game, the AI will take over.

PS3 | P

FIFA 09

Online Preview

All the world's a soccer field

PS3 AVAILABLE: Summer GENRE: Sports PUBLISHER: EA Sports DEVELOPER: EA Sports

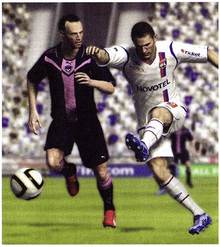
Soccer in the U.S. doesn't have to revolve around David Beckham's every move. In fact, EA's expanding feature set for *FIFA* could make the game more played, more popular, and more accepted than its Major League counterpart. Fancy a kick around? Get 19 of your closest friends (or total strangers) and form into two teams of 10 for the ultimate match day.

After setting the table with 5-on-5 matches last year, the team has worked at eradicating out-of-sync issues between 20 connected consoles. "Alan Poon and Wilson Venhola, who together form the core of our online team on the PS3, were adamant we could achieve 10 vs. 10 this year," says the David Rutter, the game's producer, "so we gave them free rein to go into uncharted waters." The upshot of that work is 10 vs. 10 games running stably in the office every day, still a few months ahead of release.

Overcoming lag issues is a technical hurdle whereas finding the right players to fill your roster slots in the Be A Pro: Online Team Play may be trickier. "One of the interesting things we have found is that while it's important to be disciplined when playing the different positions, it's also good fun to just have a kick around with your mates, with everyone screaming directions and instructions throughout the office," says Rutter.

Adding gravitas to the game world, Sony's relationship with FIFA has resulted in the exclusive FIFA Interactive World Cup. This has seen competitors from around the globe test their skills in international tournaments, but Rutter has bigger plans. "Ultimately the ambition is to have the best 11 English *FIFA* football players at each position playing against the best 11 American, German, and Italian *FIFA* football players to stage a virtual World Cup," he says. For this season, the introduction of adidas Live

Who would want to play left back? According to Rutter it's expected that the players who show discipline, stick with their tasks (man-marking, etc.), particularly in defense will become a valuable commodity for the best worldwide teams.



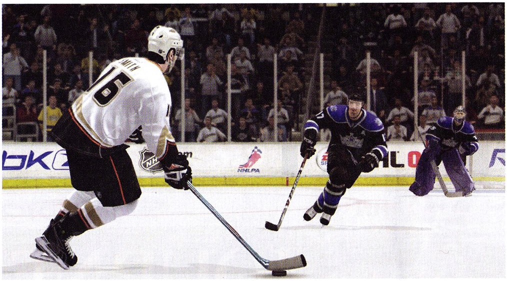
Keeping your discipline will be vital, as one mistake could mean letting down your nine other real-life teammates.

Seasons could significantly impact gamers around the globe as the game updates based on the performances of each players' real-life counterpart. Rutter tells of an army of scouts who will pass on player data that will be packaged into a weekly download, keeping abilities and attributes accurate to the real world players themselves. With each game purchase you'll get a code letting you receive the data for one of the English, French, Italian, German, Spanish, and Mexican top divisions, with additional data available for purchase through the PlayStation Store.

With EA Sports' latest *UEFA 2008* game elevating the core on-field gameplay to a previously uncharted level, the potential for that action blended with a scope and vision for online leagues that really crosses the entire world, sets *FIFA* apart as a significant standard bearer in PS3's online future. So I'm playing right-wing, who's rounding out the other nine playable positions?

Rob Smith

Last year's FIFA Interactive World Cup had 25,000 entrants, and the winner, Alfonso Ramos, walked off with the $20,000 first prize.



Clearly a fantasy, I've never ice skated in my life, but my Rob Smith alter-ego is cutting a dash.

NHL 09

First Look Preview

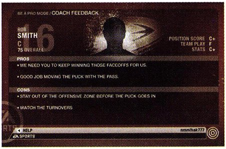
Teeth optional

PS3 AVAILABLE: Summer GENRE: Sports PUBLISHER: EA Sports DEVELOPER: EA Sports

Hockey remains one of the most playable video sports to this day, with the fast-paced, pick-up-and-play style of the *NHL* series walking a curious balance between realism and the core, accessible fun. The rule changes that impacted hockey in the post-strike era probably help non-NHL viewers acclimate to the strategies pretty quickly, and that should translate into organized and effective online league play.

"We've been playing six vs. six in the office and found that people were getting used to playing position and playing as a team in the first couple of games; it was like watching eight-year-olds playing, with everyone chasing the puck and not playing position," says Andy Agostini, online producer for *NHL 09*. We can only imagine, and anticipate that learning curve to follow similarly with the online league's early adopters.

You'll spend time crafting your ideal, persistent *NHL* player from one of 10 types organized into Forwards (Dangler, Grinder, Playmaker, Power Forward, Sniper), Defensemen (Defensive and Offensive), and Goalie (Stand up, Hybrid, and Butterfly). Achieving set objectives in online ranked matches will earn your player hockey cards that you can spend on Offense, Defense, and Athletics (or Reflexes, Puck Control, and Athletics if you're a goalie). You'll develop stats in teamwork and other areas that will also help illustrate the areas you need to work on.



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- GOOD JOB MOVING THE PUCK WITH THE PASS.

CONS
- STAY OUT OF THE OFFENSIVE ZONE BEFORE THE PUCK GOES IN
- WATCH THE TURNOVERS

Your actions are tracked on your player card, in this case showing that my teamwork skills are, well, awful. Art imitating life? That's rhetorical.

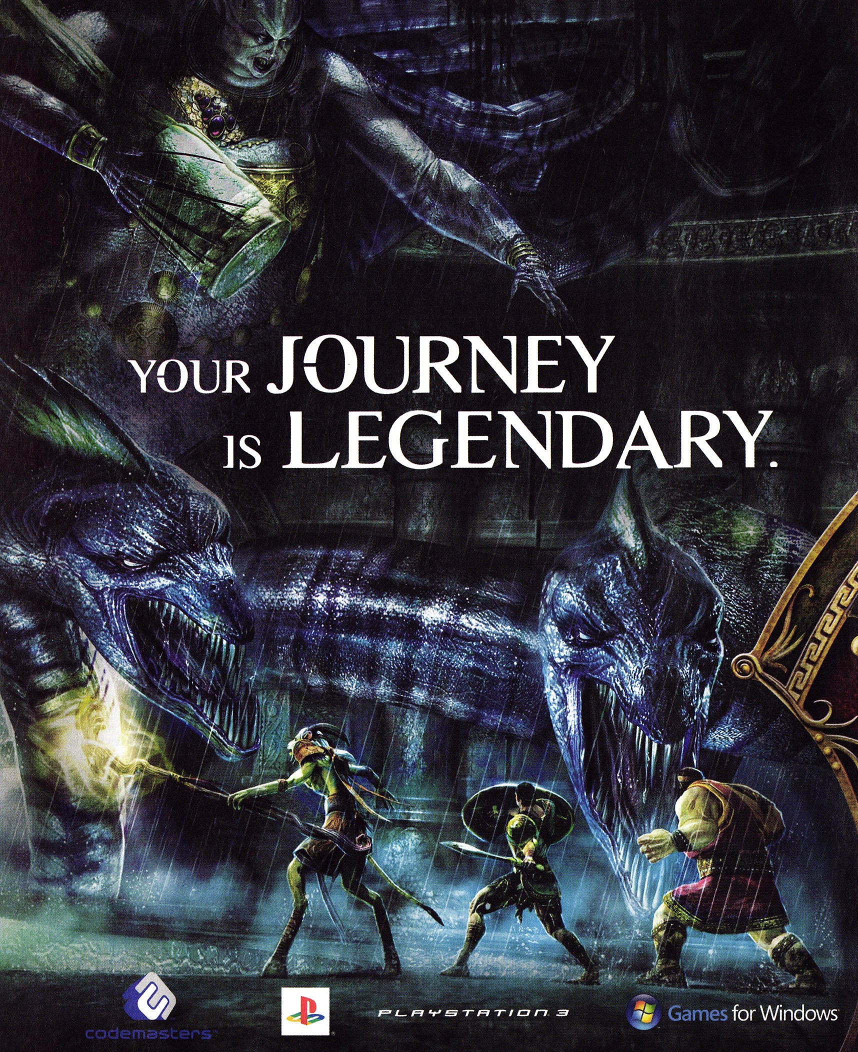
At a macro level you'll be able to start a club, assign a GM, and recruit new players. According to Agostini you can't make trades in the EA Sports Hockey League, but a GM can release or invite new players to your team, and have up to 50 players on the roster. These clubs will be supported, and able to stay in touch, through message blogs for players, and one for the GM to supply his sermon from the icy mount.

As Agostini says: "When you don't have to learn how to physically skate, hockey is a pretty accessible sport." That's been showcased over the years with casual sports fans finding it to be one of the most playable experiences on the market. The online league play where you can find a team, stay loyal, or look for moves to the big (online) time present tons of opportunity.

"As Canadians, it's sometimes easy for us to forget the game that we love so much isn't as popular elsewhere; we hope that they EASHL can play a part in helping to turn that around," says Agostini.

So, Team PTOM, ready for try-outs?

Rob Smith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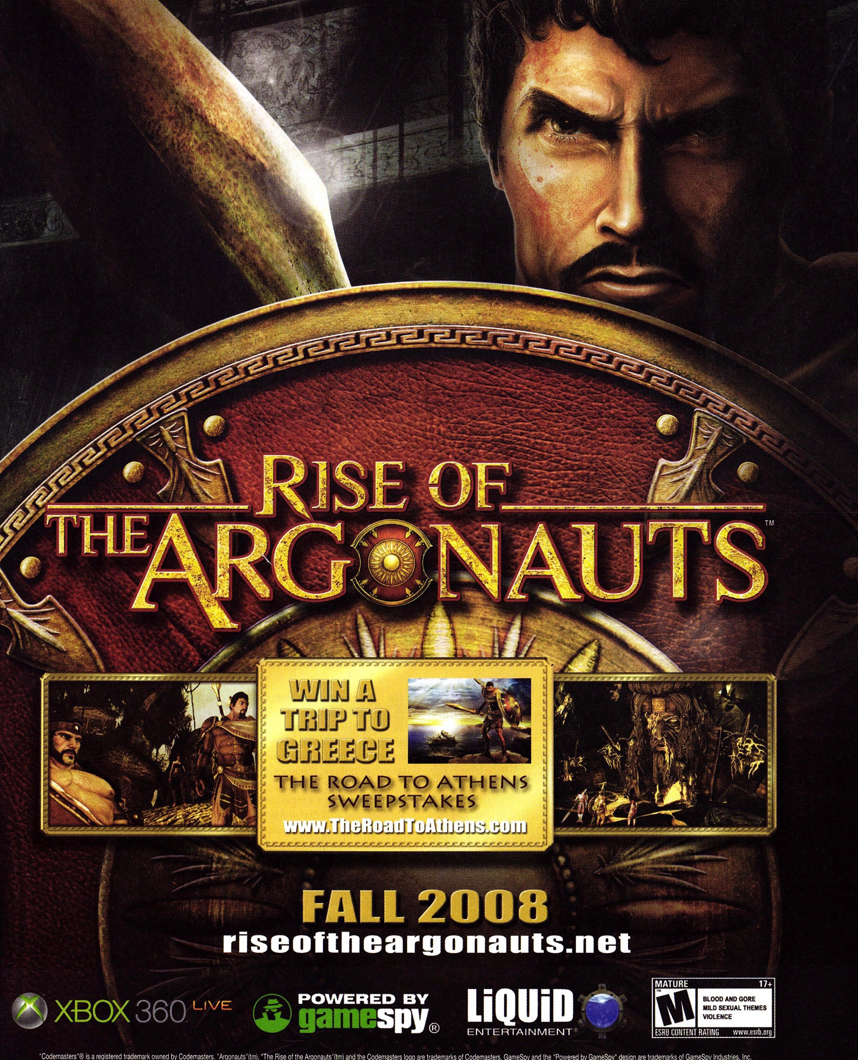

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"If you don't like the way I drive, stay off the F@#&!NG SIDEWALK!" Mattais rocks Caracus, Krakatao-style.

Mercenaries 2:

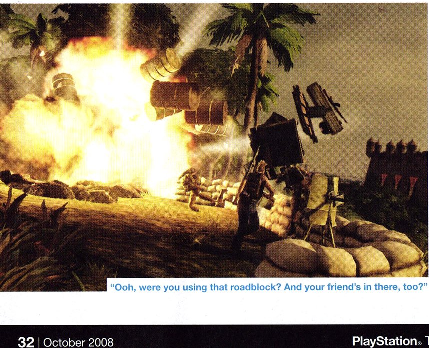
World in Flames

PS3 | P

Hands-On Preview

We will all go together, when we go

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** August **GENRE:** Action **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts **DEVELOPER:** Pandemic



"Ooh, were you using that roadblock? And your friend's in there, too?"

Mercenaries traditionally don't have many friends, except on occasion, each other, when the immediate situation calls for it (and if, of course, the price is right). Perhaps it's in that spirit that Electronic Art's forthcoming *Mercenaries 2: World in Flames* takes the slightly unexpected step of eschewing competitive multiplayer altogether in lieu of an exclusively cooperative scheme. That, or Pandemic simply wanted to focus on getting one approach right rather than getting numerous "modes" half- to three-quarters-assedly wrong.

As undeniably tempting as the notion is of players lobbing battlefield-altering cluster-bomb strikes, MOABs, and tactical nukes at each other, a moment's reflection comes up with half a dozen reasons why it might not make for the best gameplay...and frankly, after getting hands-on with *Mercenaries 2's* cooperative multiplayer for fifteen minutes or so, I forgot all about most of my baser, player-versus-player instincts; the current state of the two-player co-op is already very finely tuned.

And, as I soon discovered: Two "cooperating" players can cause enough grief and misfortune for themselves and each other just the way things are; the first guy who played co-op with me sure as hell doesn't trust me anymore.

Having already gotten a lengthy go at the single-player experience some weeks back, I started out by taking essentially the same mission I'd tackled as a single-player, except this time I had an already-experienced tester on the other end of the connection. We made quite the combat team—him playing the lithe, nimble assassin Jennifer, and me playing the borderline psychopath Mattias, neither of us able to foresee the trouble enemy helicopter gunships would provide in our immediate, shared future.

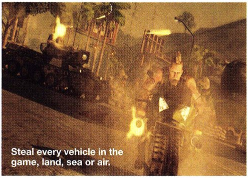
World in Flames' multiplayer allows for players to seamlessly drop in and out of the game, as many times (and at any point in the campaign) as desired, without any of it interrupting the experience of the other players. Right after we found each other's characters in the mission staging area—a beach populated by wandering Rastafarian pirates, *mon*—we availed ourselves of a couple of unattended jet skis and cruised toward the enemy, based on a not-so-nearby island (*Mercs 2* boasts a seamless, eight-by-eight mile expanse of free-roaming, varied terrain, from water to treacherous cliffside/jungle encampments to full-on downtown city blocks.)

A great element of *World in Flames* that really makes you feel like a greedy, opportunist thieving son-of-a-bitch is the ability to steal, at any time, basically any piece of enemy equipment you happen to find lying around—from the expected discarded weapons and crates of ammo to vehicles of all kinds (cars, jeeps, tanks), to mounted/anti-aircraft weapons, and even loose, high-yield warheads.

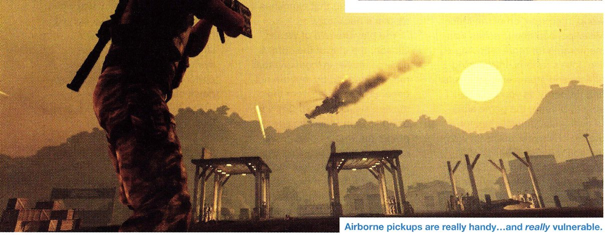
Turn on the megaphones, cue up "Ride of *La Cucaracha.*" I love the smell of cheap oil in the morning.

If you see something you need, or feel you might possibly need later—or hell, even just something you really, really *want* for no immediately-justifiable reason—making off with it is as simple as tagging the object in question with a smoke canister and sitting back as one of your cargo-copter pilot buddies-for-hire swoops in, attaches a cable hook, and hauls the thing away. This can be tricky by yourself, as you'll usually need to provide some form of cover for your larcenous LZ—if your pilot-friend takes even the wimpiest fire from the ground, he'll bail out on the pick-up, and you'll have to try again.

In co-op play, this sort of operation feels extremely rewarding, and even natural: One of you spots the expensive hardware you want to appropriate, takes out the guards and weapon-emplacements nearest the booty (being very careful not to destroy said hardware in the process), and makes the tag-signal; the other can stand guard (preferably at the fire-controls of something really hideous, like a mounted high-caliber gun or even a tank) and leisurely pick off any late-arriving enemy reinforcements who might show up to ruin the show at the last second.



Steal every vehicle in the game, land, sea or air.

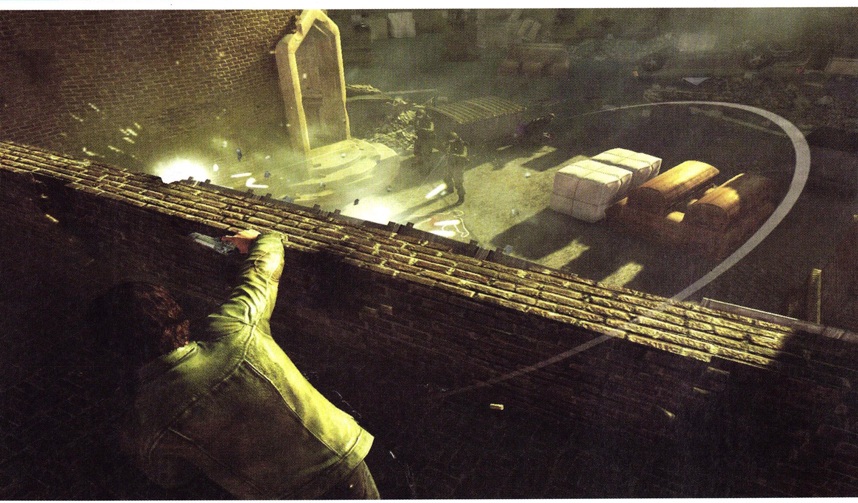


Airborne pickups are really handy...and *really* vulnerable.

Another very satisfying aspect to the co-op battles: Once you've fought your way side-by-side through encirclements of local goons and hired thugs, there's usually something especially large near the center that needs some form of air-strike destruction—something like a warehouse, road block, hardened bunker or, if you're really lucky, a posh, sprawling villa.

Co-op Tip #1 is to have your quicker, more elusive teammate be the one to actually sneak up and laser-paint whatever you're going to cruise-missile into smithereens, while the slower, heavy-weapons maniac hangs back at a minimum safe distance.

Co-op Tip #2—and there's nothing quite like learning this the hard way—is to keep the phrase "minimum safe distance" stamped clearly and legibly in your brain. Who woulda thought something called the "Mother of All Bombs" could do something so unmotherly to the guy(s) who called it in, even standing so far away from their intended target? *Aye Caramba.* Chris Hudak



Wanat explained that *Tony Hawk*-style combos were a big inspiration. This means using contextual situations to slide across tables and roll from cover to cover, for example.

PS3 | P

Wanted

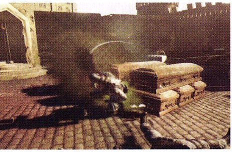
Balletic bullets dancing through your brainpan

PS3 AVAILABLE: Winter GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Warner Brothers Interactive DEVELOPER: GRIN

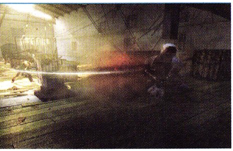
It shouldn't be much of a surprise that the game of the movie of the comic book *Wanted* has been in the works for a little while. The Hollywood interpretation of the Mark Millar-penned comic series was memorable for more than Angelina Jolie's tattoos. Introducing effects and stunts as spectacular and visionary as you've probably ever seen, the game aims to give you a tangible feel for the life of a super-assassin with the ability—with the flick of a wrist—to curve bullets. But Pete Wanat, the game's producer and a veteran of *Scarface* and the highly-acclaimed *Riddick* games, is quick to point out that this isn't a recreation of the comics or the movie. Where the movie follows a plot exploring the background of the protagonist's father, the game is a fresh setup that examines the mother's backstory.

You play the role of Wesley Gibson, the star of the comics and the movie, in locations that may be inspired by, but are not generally just taken from the movie sets. Developer GRIN is using its own Diesel engine to power the whole bullet curve mechanic that, according to the team, took three to four months just to prototype. It works by holding the right trigger to fire, then using the left analog stick to choose a direction for the curve. Within the game it's represented by a contextual curved trajectory line (a little like you'd see in a golf game) that's red if your aim is wide of the mark, and white when it has a foe targeted. The curved bullet mechanic is required largely because of the cover system that you'll use to keep protected while still trying to take down enemies.

The level we were shown was set on a plane in mid-air. Gibson was involved in a frenetic firefight with a bunch of goons as the plane rocked and rolled; doors were blown out and any bad guys nearby followed them. Using movable cover, we crouch behind (in this case) a drinks



"Yes," say the devs, "we will have head matter.



You can run, but against curved bullets, you can't hide.

The brutal action dynamic, combo moves, and gore quotient should deliver plenty of memorable moments.

Multiple paths through the outdoor levels include hidden areas, with about three different routes through each location.

cart, push it down the aisle, and get a better bead on the goons. Then, using the curved bullet mechanism, we shot around a corner, causing our foes to stagger into the clear where we finished them. Gibson is also adept at close-quarters combat, grabbing and using enemies as human shields as well as executing finishing moves.

Each action sequence will hit cinematic overdrive with the use of what the developers are calling "Assassin Time." A take on the now-commonplace Bullet Time mechanic, it builds when you use cover and when you shoot down the baddies. And it works pretty much how you'd figure—slowing time, letting you target and cap several enemies at once before they have a chance to react.

Perhaps at this point you're expecting a standard movie-license game, but consider first Wanat's personal track record, which alone might be enough to assure a certain level of quality. To this, Wanat adds: "Universal stepped up to find a game developer for this project before a publisher was found." This commitment to the project is still paying off through the development process, with Wanat telling us that the team was hiring what they termed a full-time "gore guy." This M-rated game will definitely test your intestinal fortitude with the promise of takedown moves including a shot to the back of the head with the bullet exiting through the mouth. "Yes, we will have head matter," the devs gleefully tell us.

Aiding the cinematic presentation, Wanat confirmed that Mark Millar "had some script influence" and that the soundtrack will use the movie's score. But if your fandom is more in the comic realm, Wanat suggests keeping an eye out for another Mark Millar announcement related to the game (a comic book series based on this story?). We'll bring you that news as soon as we have it!

Rob Smith

You'll get to use a variety of different weapons, including knives, dual-wielded pistols, and more.

The setting may be sci-fi fantasy, but the action is harsh, gritty reality.

PS3 | P

Real-world soldiers don't have to go it alone, so why should you?

Why do the Helghast still wear gas masks when they're on Helghan?

Killzone 2

Located somewhere between the twilight and danger zones

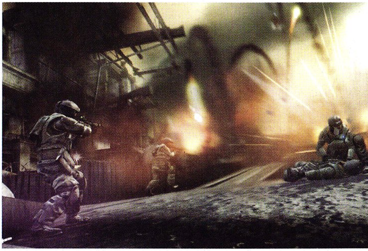
PS3 **AVAILABLE:** February 2009 **GENRE:** First-Person Shooter **PUBLISHER:** SCEE **DEVELOPER:** Guerrilla Games

Navigating the vast ocean of PS3 shooters on display at E3 was daunting. Many showed great promise, but separating the feature sets became harder each day. Now that I look back on the whole experience, the game that most readily emerges from the murky haze is *Killzone 2.* True, the *Resistance 2* demo did feature a colossal, *Cloverfield*-esque creature, but *Killzone* offered the complete package, with solid action gameplay and exciting approaches to both single- and multiplayer that, in my mind, really helped to set the game apart.

In *Killzone's* single-player component, you play as series-newcomer Sev—member of the four man Alpha Squad led by returning character Rico Velasquez—during the Interstellar Strategic Alliance's invasion of Helghast home planet Helghan. The ISA aims to retrieve several stolen nuclear weapons and to eliminate bellicose Helghast emperor Scolar Visari once and for all, but the developers are quick to point out that the burden doesn't rest entirely on Sev's shoulders.

You are not a one-man army; you are merely an ordinary soldier immersed in a war, and nearly every design decision reinforces your immersion in this bigger picture. Unlike the original *Killzone,* the narrative follows just one character, and absolutely everything uses a first-person perspective including the new cover system and the cutscenes, all of which are in-engine and dialogue-driven. You can carry just one primary weapon, and

Motion captured animations will make for realistic movement and interaction.



Screenshots really don't do the game's explosions justice.

your health, rather than appearing on the HUD, regenerates when you're out of harms way. And though you can't issue orders to your squad mates, there are several "buddy assist" moments throughout the game that function as short co-op sections.

Naturally, this immersion extends to the gameplay as well. The team is working to strike a balance between fantasy and reality that grounds the game in gritty, frenetic combat but still allows for poignant Hollywood moments, and a few "memorable encounters" boss battles and dramatic set pieces. This loose realism should also force you to move tactically rather than run-and-gun through the entire game.

Though my hands-on time only covered about half of a mission, it left me with several clear impressions: this game looks amazing, especially the lighting effects and explosions in Helghan's harsh gray landscape, where austere steel and concrete cities lend the environments a creepy industrial aesthetic; the cover system—which lets you attach to the nearest large object with a press of the L1 button—feels very natural, even in first-person; and decimating the side of a building with a chain gun totally rules. Even character movement and the impact of bullets had a tangible, solid feel. It wasn't quite a nonstop thrill ride, but to be fair, it was a very early level.

The most intriguing portion of *Killzone 2,* however, is the part that I didn't actually get to play: multiplayer, the most important aspect of which is player progression. At the heart of this system lie "badges," which roughly translate to character classes *(Team Fortress 2,* anyone?). All the usual suspects are present—medic, engineer, scout, assault, tactician, and saboteur—and each one comes with a primary and secondary special ability. But here's the cool part: you can match any of the primary skills with any of the secondary skills to create a unique class that matches your play style.

The badges aren't available the moment you pop in the disc, though; you must unlock them by improving your military rank. There are 12 ranks and 46 medals that you earn by performing specific feats, and leveling up will unlock new badges, additional or improved character attributes, and squads and clans.

The squad system is intriguing: during any match, two to four players can form a short-term, makeshift alliance using a quick menu system. As a squad, you'll be able to see each other's HUD info, utilize a special chat channel, and spawn wherever the designated leader is on the map.

Clans, on the other hand, are pretty straightforward. Up to 64 players can band together to battle other teams and wager "clan valor" (clan currency) in either clan challenges or tournaments with up to 256 teams. Clan creation simply requires a PSN tag and will automatically generate a private clan page on Killzone.com, which will also exhibit the game's extensive stat tracking capability.

And let's not forget these other specifications: Matches support up to 32 players on eight maps of varying sizes in any of five missions (read: match types). Rounds can contain multiple missions, as the game automatically shifts to the next objective once the first is completed. Also, respawn location can be chosen and even previewed before jumping back into play. And Trophies *will* be supported.

In an endless sea of shooters, tight design and exciting ideas look to keep *Killzone 2* riding high. And come February, I'll definitely be looking to kick some Helgh-ass. Scott Butterworth

This building may look impressive now, but a few clips worth of ammo will change that quickly.

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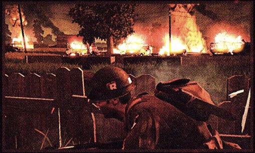

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language
Mild Sexual Themes

PC
DVD-ROM
SOFTWARE

PLAYSTATION 3

XBOX 360® LIVE

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Updates, sneak peeks, works-in-progress

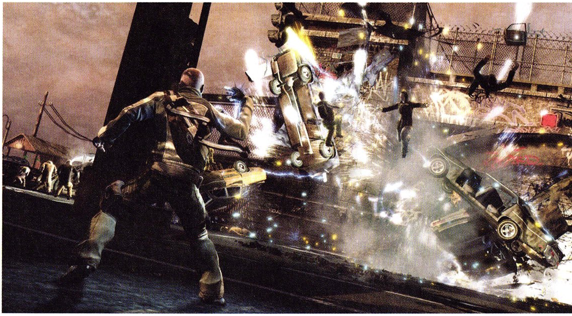
inFamous

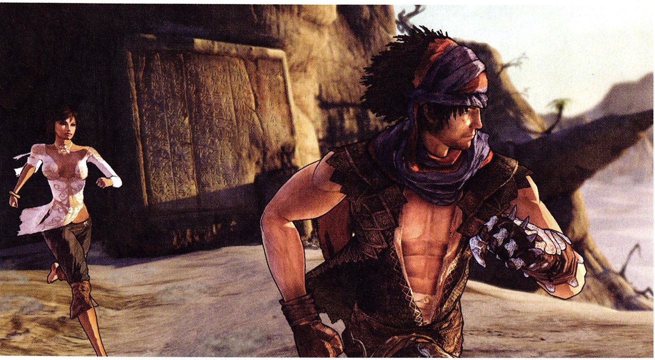
First Look

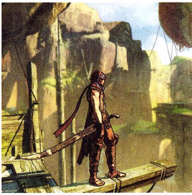
PS3 AVAILABLE: 2009 GENRE: Open-world Action
PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Sucker Punch

Nate Fox, the game director at developer Sucker Punch, and also the writer of the studio's new game, *inFamous,* describes the team as "hardcore graphic novel geeks." That fandom infuses the striking visual style as well as the core game mechanic in an open-world modern setting. Your character, Cole, was a bike courier before a blast endowed him with emerging superpowers. Taking cues from *Heroes,* the origin of understanding the powers (and finding others who have been similarly affected) forms the early game story as you blast lightning at gang members who have taken over most parts of Empire City. The living city appears to be a fascinating place to investigate, with the paparazzi able to make (break or influence) your standing with the population by their coverage of your exploits.

Still some time from release, color us intrigued by the potential of the setting and gameplay experience. We'll bring more details in the months ahead. Rob





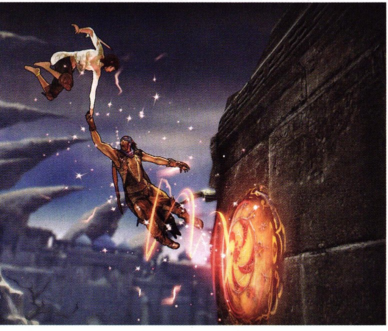


Prince of Persia

First Look

PS3 AVAILABLE: Holiday GENRE: Adventure PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal

While we knew that *Prince of Persia's* cel-shaded graphics would give it a unique visual style, it already seems the game could pass for an animated film. The Prince and his new magic-adept partner, the delectable Elika, are battling the dark corruption that the evil Ahriman has brought upon the land. The signature platforming-while-battling-bad-guys-and-avoiding-traps gameplay of the franchise endures, but the open-world environments allow non-linear navigation and new moves like the Grip Fall and co-op jumps add fresh control wrinkles. The boss battles are more cinematic than ever and focus on the interplay between the Prince's physical prowess and Elika's magical abilities. It's not easy for a game like *PoP* to live up to its legacy, but this *Prince* looks ready to regain the throne. Roger

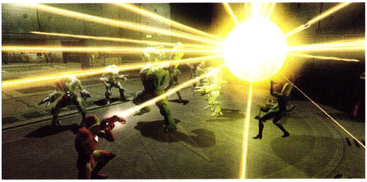


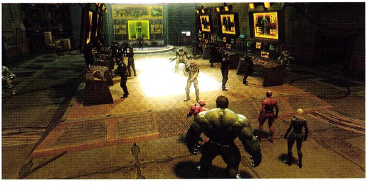
Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2:

Fusion First Look

PS3 AVAILABLE: 2009 GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Activision DEVELOPER: Vicarious Visions

The new development team is introducing a few innovations as it tackles the sequel to the popular *MUA.* The heroes' costume designs and textures were created as if intended for a film; it delivers a darker narrative tone (dictated by shades of grey instead of black and white); it introduces a deeper RPG-style character development system, and fusions (combat moves that "fuse" two heroes' skills, like the "Savage Sphere" of Hulk and Invisible Woman or the "Vicious Cycle" of Iron Man and Daredevil). Looks like 2009 is shaping up to be a fantastic year for comic fan gamers. Teresa





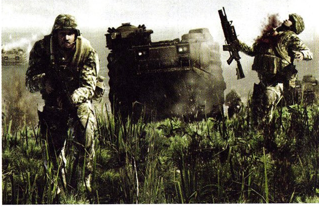
PlayStation Gallery

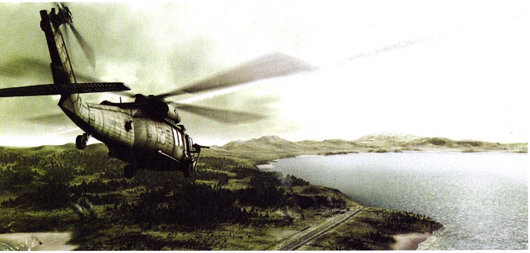
Operation Flashpoint 2:

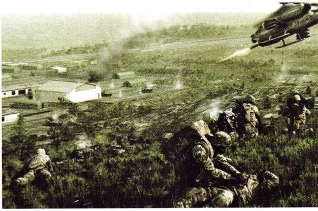
Dragon Rising First Look

PS3 AVAILABLE: 2009 GENRE: Tactical Combat PUBLISHER: Codemasters DEVELOPER: Codemasters Studio

A sequel to a 2001 PC game may not initially excite PS3 gamers, but the sense of grittiness and authenticity in *Operation Flashpoint 2: Dragon Rising* makes it an instant standout in the crowded tactical combat genre. Set on the Russian island of Skira, a hardcore left-wing faction of China's People's Liberation Army has invaded the oil-rich territory in an aggressive power grab. As part of the U.S. forces deployed to support the Russians, you'll assume infantry, Special Ops, armor, and air support roles as you battle to recapture the 135-square mile island. Adding a realistic flavor, weapon changes occur in real-time and wounds need a medic's attention or you run the risk of bleeding to death. There are over 70 weapons and 50-plus vehicles in the game, but it's Codemasters' ambitious resolve to create "the real experience of war"—down to the ballistics characteristics of weapon-specific bullets—that makes our trigger fingers itch. Roger



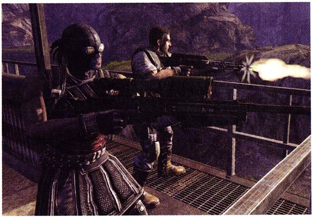


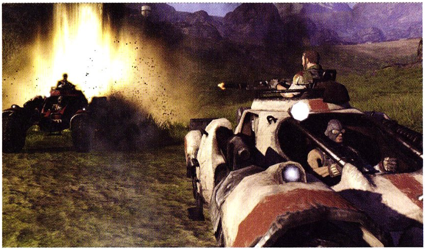


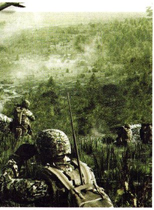
Borderlands First Look

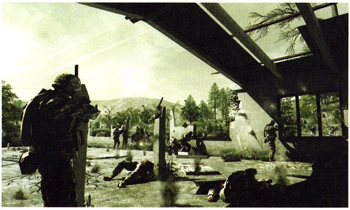
PS3 AVAILABLE: 2009 GENRE: FPS PUBLISHER: 2K Games DEVELOPER: Gearbox

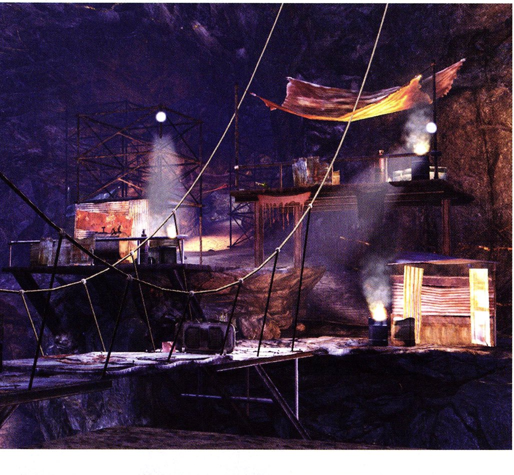
Hey, it's developed by Gearbox. Interest piqued, preview done. Oh, what's that? You want a little more info? OK, here's what we've got: It's an FPS with a twist—an RPS, or roleplaying shooter, if you will. Along with the heart-thumping tactical action you'd expect from the dev team behind *Brothers in Arms,* you'll also get a level bar. Shoot enough baddies in this futuristic wasteland (actually, it's a hostile colony planet hiding tasty alien tech) and you'll level up, allowing you to adjust your skills and stats. Also impressive is the sheer number of weapons, promised at half a million—all the better to take advantage of the game's option to shoot off body parts. Designed for co-op play, *Borderlands* has multiple paths and strategies for tackling any situation, along with some killer vehicle segments that are guaranteed to have you bickering over who drives versus who shoots. And hey, it's developed by Gearbox. 'Nuff said. Gary











Bayonetta First Look

PS3 AVAILABLE: 2009
GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: Platinum Games

Whoever came up with the phrase, "Boys don't make passes at girls in glasses," hasn't met Bayonetta. If the overtly sexy witch's glasses don't make you take her seriously, then the firepower she's packing (even in the heels of her boots) will, making her a surefire pick to become the new fanboy pin-up favorite. Our early peek reveals gameplay and a visual style reminiscent of *Devil May Cry*—understandable, as *Bayonetta* is *DMC* creator Hideki Kamiya's latest project. The fantasy-themed game is an alluring blend of fast-paced hand-to-hand combat, high-powered gunplay, and spell casting, but when Bayonetta conjured an enormous smoke demon to finish off an already huge level boss...well, it became love. Roger

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PlayStation Gallery

Resistance:

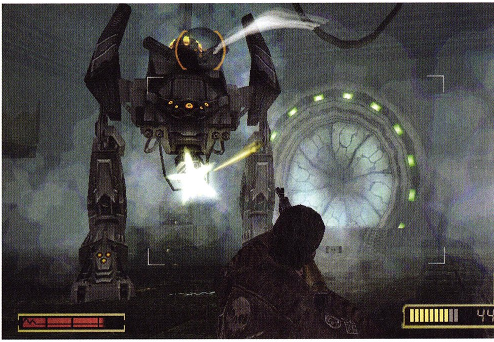
Retribution

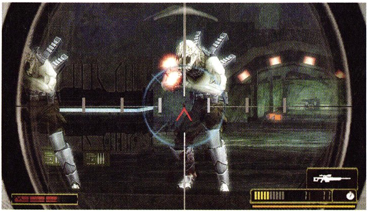
First Look

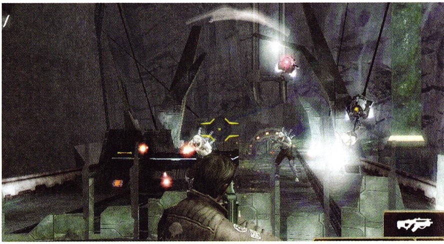
PSP AVAILABLE: Spring 2009 GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: SCEA
DEVELOPER: Bend Studio

The first question Insomniac's Ted Price asked Sony's Bend Studio in pitching a PSP spinoff for *Resistance:* What kind of weapons are you gonna make? Several critically acclaimed PSP iterations of *Syphon Filter* under its belt had them ready for this query. Along with old faves like the Carbine and LAARK, Bend is adding types that fuse alien tech with human know-how, including a time-slowing sniper rifle aptly named the Longbow 1S-1K (as in, "one shot, one kill"). Also new is a proprietary targeting system where the central portion of the screen is framed by an aim-assist window, and a small reticule will follow any enemies within the larger window. Rather than trying to target your shots with pinpoint accuracy, you can move the larger aim-assist window to find groupings of baddies, and quickly tap a face button to switch among targets.

So how does this game fit within the franchise's story? Set directly after *Fall of Man, Retribution* bridges the gap between the PS3 games, keeping the action in the recently devastated Western Europe. This time James Grayson takes the lead role; motivated by vengeance, the British marine had to kill his own brother when he was found within a Chimera conversion center, and Grayson has since vowed to destroy all conversion centers. He soon finds himself teamed up with the Maquis—the European resistance—and embarks on a series of missions to retake Europe. Gary







Ben 10:

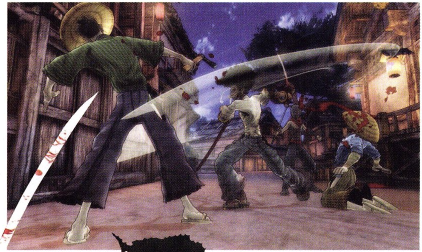
Alien Force: The Game

First Look

PSP/PS2 RELEASE: October GENRE: Action
PUBLISHER: D3Publisher DEVELOPER: Monkey Bar Games

This one's for the crowd of six- to 14-year-olds who have their eyes glued to Cartoon Network every Saturday morning. The *Ben 10: Alien Force* TV show is set five years after the original *Ben 10,* and the videogame serves as a "lost episode" of sorts, allowing you to traverse both familiar and new environs as Ben, Gwen, Kevin, and five of Ben's alien forms, alone or in two-player co-op. Better brush off that Omnitrix for the game's fall release. Teresa

Press Start to join
ator



Afro Samurai First Look

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Winter **GENRE:** Action **PUBLISHER:** Namco Bandai **DEVELOPER:** Namco Bandai

Afro Samurai is one of those relatively rare "you had our interest at the title" games. Based on the (hip-)hopped-up manga of the same name—it was later adapted to an anime miniseries—*Afro Samurai* is a super-violent fighter focused on three main aspects of combat: straight-up on-foot swordfighting, terrain-based flips and kicks off the local environment/objects, and classic anime-inspired aerial hacking and slashing.

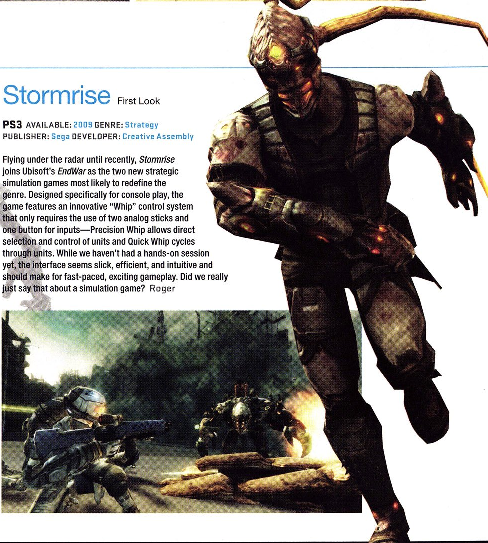
And what hacking and slashing; *Afro Samurai* employs a dynamic scheme that reflects the cuts and attack-angles you actually cause during combat (as opposed to canned animations), so when your enemies finally tumble into bloody chunks, they're the chunks your specific attacks actually made. A clean, meter-free interface relies on a variable color palette to reflect how hurt or "focused" Afro is at any given moment, and the soundtrack pumps with RZA (Wu-Tang Clan) and Chuy Gomez.

A wildly anachronistic samurai style, the voice work of Samuel L. Jackson, cel-shaded "elegant violence" set to a hip-hop beat, a sprawling tale of revenge: If Namco Bandai isn't careful, they might just end up releasing what's by far the coolest title it's ever handled. Chris

Stormrise First Look

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** 2009 **GENRE:** Strategy **PUBLISHER:** Sega **DEVELOPER:** Creative Assembly

Flying under the radar until recently, *Stormrise* joins Ubisoft's *EndWar* as the two new strategic simulation games most likely to redefine the genre. Designed specifically for console play, the game features an innovative "Whip" control system that only requires the use of two analog sticks and one button for inputs—Precision Whip allows direct selection and control of units and Quick Whip cycles through units. While we haven't had a hands-on session yet, the interface seems slick, efficient, and intuitive and should make for fast-paced, exciting gameplay. Did we really just say that about a simulation game? Roger

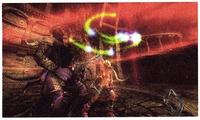


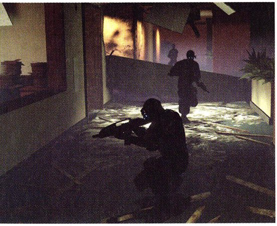
PlayStation Gallery

X-Blades First Look

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Late 2008 **GENRE:** Action **PUBLISHER:** Topware Interactive/ SouthPeak Games **DEVELOPER:** Gaijin Entertainment

Sometimes—trust me on this—a little bit of utter, over-sexed personality confliction can be a good thing. Particularly when there's a dangerous, hot girl involved. With this in mind, consider *X-Blades:* An action game—clearly inspired by Japanese anime—headed for the North American market, created by (despite the name) a Russian developer starring a Caucasian, blonde-tressed warrior-chick with Matrix-style tendencies…named "Ayumi." If this doesn't already make you just a little bit dizzy, make no mistake, there is something wrong with you. Our scantily-clad heroine—whose wardrobe makes even Lara Croft's newest Underworld scuba-ensemble look a bit on the prudish side—hacks, slashes, and gun-blades her way through 40 indoor and outdoor levels, racking up XP to be converted into melee/gun combat chops as well as some twenty-odd magic/ teleportation skills. It's not the deepest thing goin' but the combination of melee/ ranged "Gun Kata" combat, bullet-time theatrics, alternate endings for "good" or "bad" actions, and the unapologetically perv-anime fan-service style make *X-Blades*—in spite of its awful name—worth watching out for. Chris



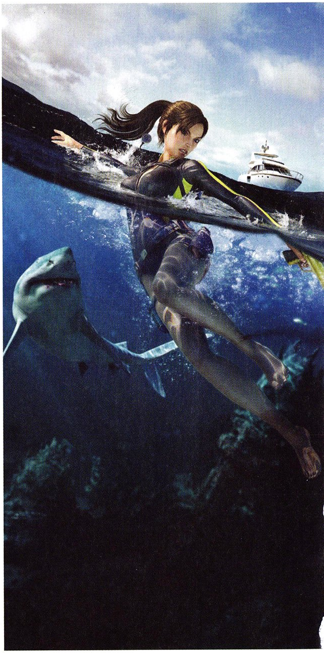


Alpha Protocol

First Look

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** February 2009 **GENRE:** Action/RPG **PUBLISHER:** Sega **DEVELOPER:** Obsidian

Pegged as a modern espionage RPG, *Alpha Protocol's* gameplay is a compelling mix of action shooter and story-driven roleplaying. As agent Michael Thornton, you face split-second decisions and their short- and long-term ramifications: Do you calmly inquire for information, aggressively interrogate, or resort to gunplay? Skill points are acquired as objectives are achieved and can be applied to enhance personal abilities or weapons performance, but ultimately, it's your decisions that determine the type of hero or anti-hero Thornton becomes. Roger

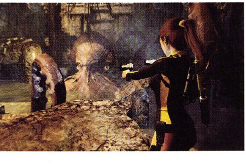


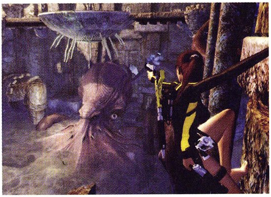
Tomb Raider:

Underworld Hands-On

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** November **GENRE:** Action Adventure **PUBLISHER:** Eidos **DEVELOPER:** Crystal Dynamics

"What could Lara do?" That was the question that informed every decision in the design and gameplay of *Underworld.* Note the word could—not would. Indeed, developer Crystal Dynamics wasn't overly worried about capturing reality as much as infusing a sense of believability into Lara's actions. So, for example, if Lara could pick up a large carved stick to insert into a hole to create a stepping point, she could also toss said stick at an angry tiger, since it only makes sense within the game's world. Embracing this philosophy opened up a slew of new moves and actions for our feisty heroine, including *Uncharted*-esque free-climbing up cliffs and across ancient tombs. Also noteworthy in our brief playtest: a dual-target system, allowing you to shoot at multiple enemies at once. You'll certainly need all these new skills and actions in order to find Thor's hammer in a newly discovered ruin at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea. Gary





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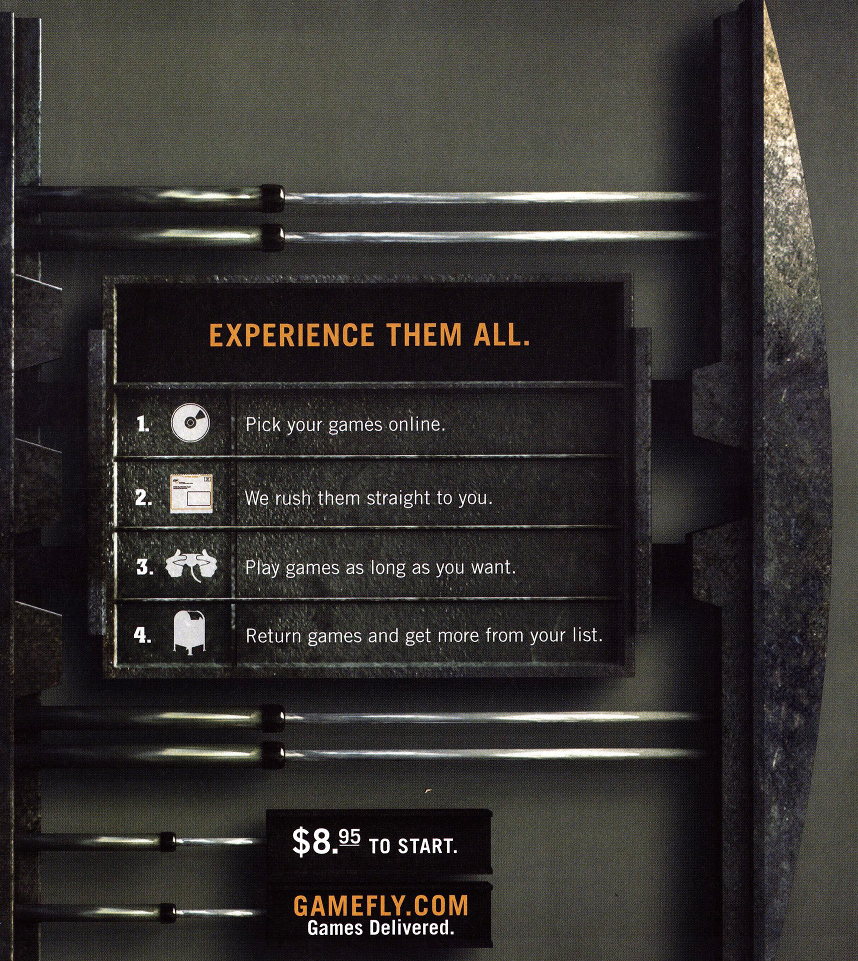

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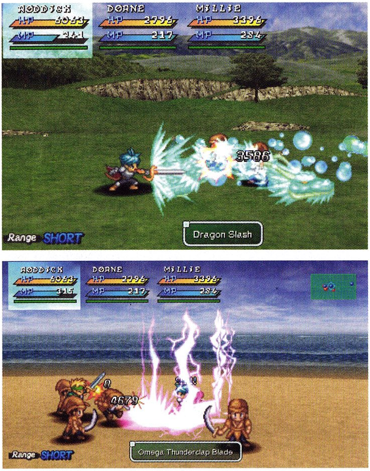
PlayStation Gallery

Star Ocean First Look
First Departure and Second Evolution

PSP AVAILABLE: October / January 2009 GENRE: RPG
PUBLISHER: Square Enix DEVELOPER: Square Enix

It's been a relatively light year for Squenix fans, but that'll change this October with the release of *First Departure* on PSP. A hardcore fanboy favorite, the *Star Ocean* franchise has been retooled for the handheld, with enhanced widescreen visuals and a subtly tweaked battle system. *Departure* has never been released in the U.S.—reason enough to try out the real-time battles and get lost in the immersive quest to stop a galactic war. *Second Evolution,* on the other hand, was a critically acclaimed PSone release, with a staggering amount of depth in both the battle system and the storyline. Both will keep you busy, starting with *First* in October and then *Second* in January. Gary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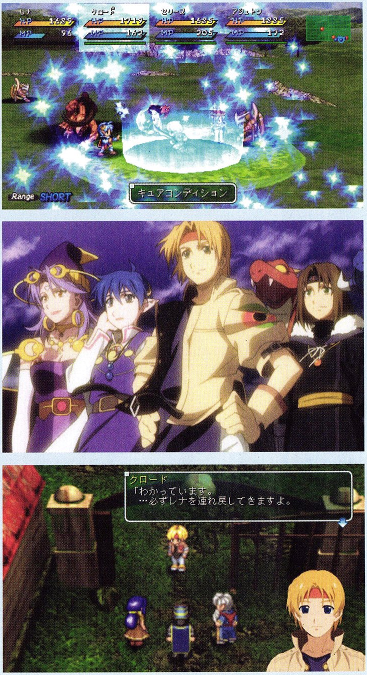
First Departure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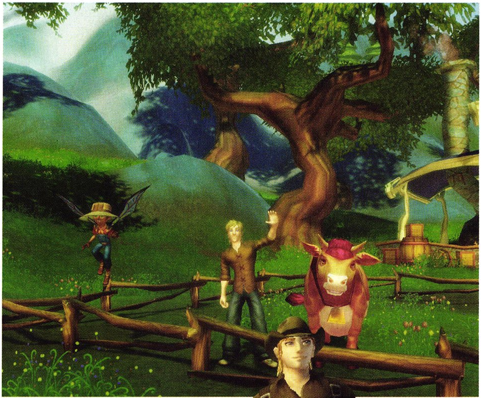
…必ずレナを連れ戻してきますよ。」

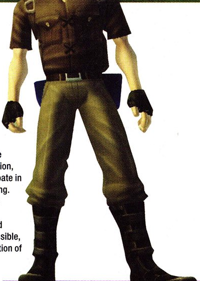
Second Evolution

Tom Clancy's HAWX
Hands-On

PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: Flight Simulation/Action
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Bucharest

The Tom Clancy moniker on a game seems to equate to quality lately, and *HAWX* is no exception. The game looks gorgeous, but it plays even better with over 50 aircraft available for combat over realistic satellite-photo–derived cities and locations. Our hands-on multiplayer session transpired over Cape Canaveral where the game's Assistance Mode made it easy for novices to competitively engage more experienced pilots. *HAWX* isn't a pure flight sim, but it captures the spirit of dogfighting—the real challenge is to avoid getting a missile up your afterburner while you're distracted by the aerial eye candy. Roger

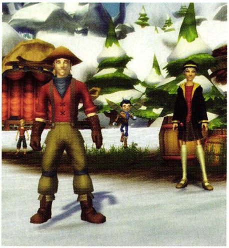


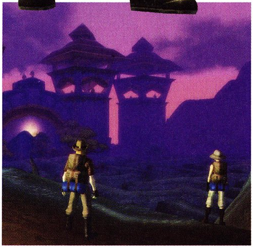


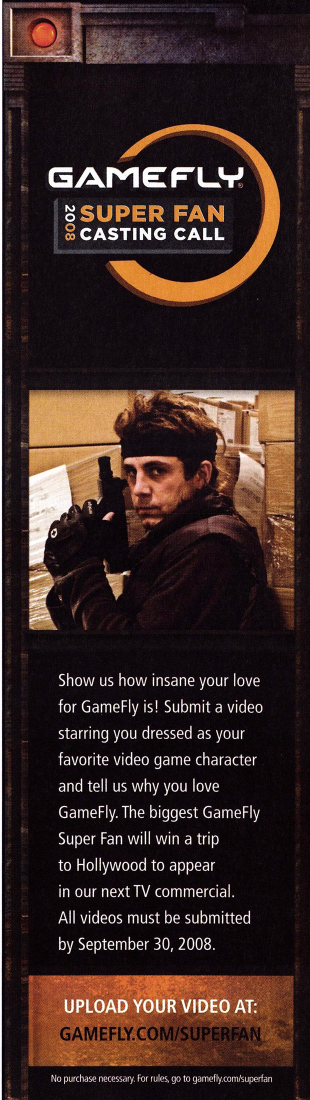
FreeRealms First Look

PS3 AVAILABLE: Early 2009 GENRE: MMORPG
PUBLISHER: Sony Online Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Sony Online Entertainment

Aimed at the nine- to 15-year-old demographic, *FreeRealms* is a family-friendly MMORPG that isn't afraid to challenge the genre conventions, in part by having significant game areas free to play (with other locations locked behind pay-to-access gates). The game blends real-world and fantasy themes with the core experience revolving around adventure, *Sims*-style simulation, mini-games, and socialization. FreeRealmers are free to participate in the entire gamut of play styles or the one they find most appealing. Character classes can be switched at anytime without having to re-earn status and teleportation to your friends' location, your own last location, or your quest origination point simplifies world navigation. While *FreeRealms'* aim is to make MMOs more accessible, it's proving to be a test bed of innovations for SOE's new generation of hardcore MMORPG projects as well. Roger







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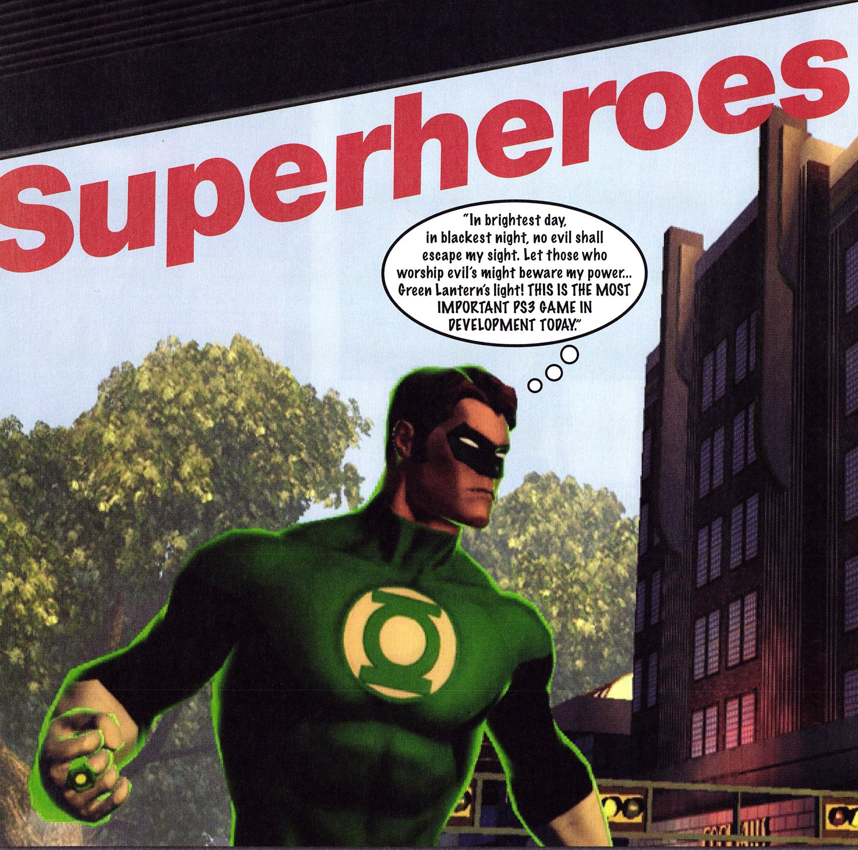
Hawkman

BATMAN **Superman** **Brainiac** **FLASH**

RIDDLER

Superheroes


"In brightest day, in blackest night, no evil shall escape my sight. Let those who worship evil's might beware my power... Green Lantern's light! THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PS3 GAME IN DEVELOPMENT TODAY."

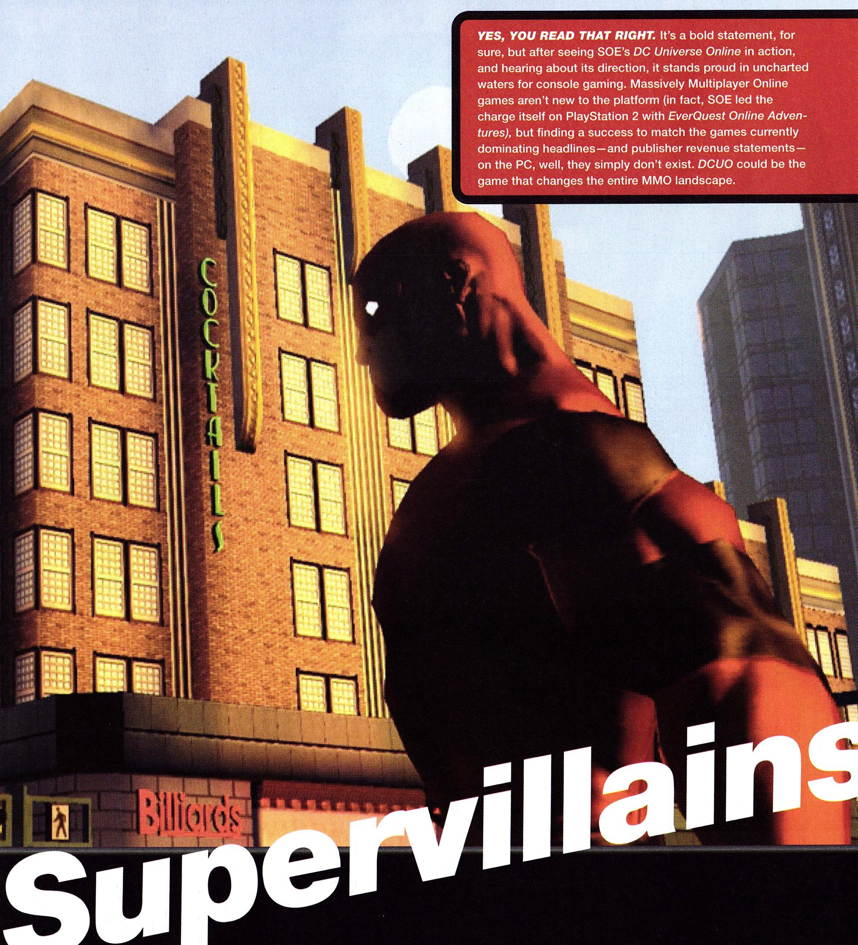
Platform: PS3

AVAILABLE: 2009
GENRE: Massively Multiplayer Online RPG
PUBLISHER: SOE
DEVELOPER: SOE Austin

Harley Quinn

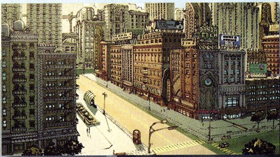
Bizarro **WONDER WOMAN** **Joker** **GREEN LANTERN**

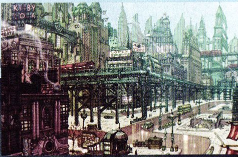
Lex Luthor



YES, YOU READ THAT RIGHT. It's a bold statement, for sure, but after seeing SOE's *DC Universe Online* in action, and hearing about its direction, it stands proud in uncharted waters for console gaming. Massively Multiplayer Online games aren't new to the platform (in fact, SOE led the charge itself on PlayStation 2 with *EverQuest Online Adventures*), but finding a success to match the games currently dominating headlines—and publisher revenue statements—on the PC, well, they simply don't exist. *DCUO* could be the game that changes the entire MMO landscape.

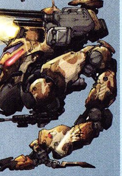
Supervillains

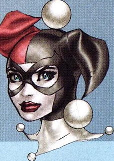


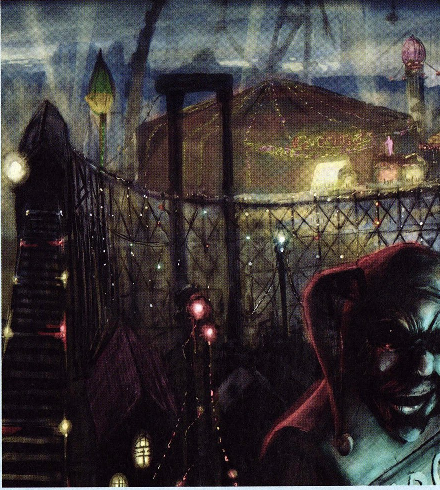


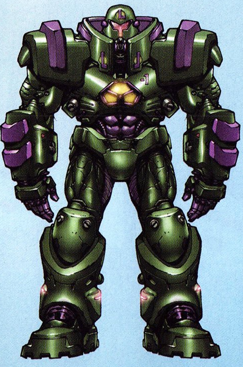
The game world is planned to cover around nine districts, comprising some 80 city blocks.

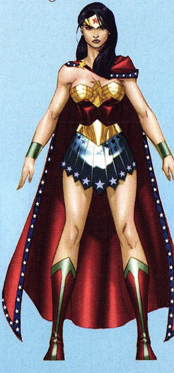
Jim Lee—a self-confessed big-time gamer—helps ensure that the translation of visual identity from a 2D comic panel to 3D interactive game world adheres to and honors a setting intimately familiar to a legion of fans.





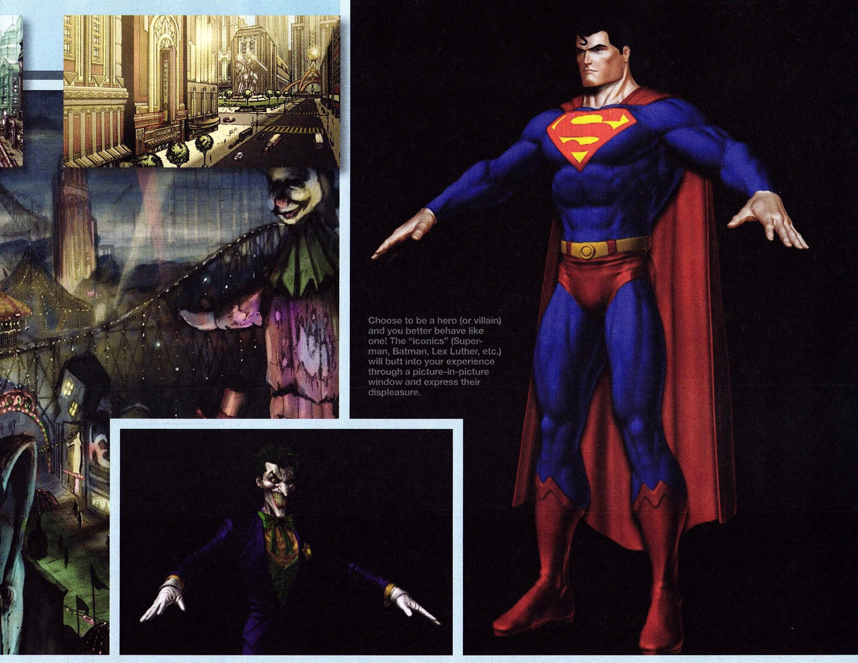






Sony Online Entertainment's Austin studio blends veteran MMO and action game development experience to help ensure that the key components of the overriding gameplay hit the right notes for what's essentially a new audience. "It is a challenge in a game of this magnitude to keep everyone making the same game," says Chris Cao, the confidant, jovial lead designer of *DCUO.* Cao's intimate familiarity with the perils of MMO development was earned plowing the same role on SOE's *EverQuest II* (where Austin studio head John Blakely also served as Executive Producer), a credibility crucial to surviving the hard, pointy end of the highly competitive world of MMO creation. If next-generation game design and development is already considered a marathon, then producing a successful MMO is the ultraman endurance challenge. Not the Japanese Ultraman, you understand…anyway.

Illustrating that fact, as we wandered the otherwise non-descript office hallways of SOE's Austin office, colorful, invariably stylish concept art pieces created by Executive Creative Director Jim Lee (and his team at Wildstorm) adorned the walls, confessing "Approved" date stamps from mid-2006. Since the game still has a vague 2009 release plan (expect later rather than earlier), that's at least three years of art development; the design outline was being fleshed out even earlier. Lee's role is to ensure his own DC universe style is retained throughout every facet of the design, to provide a canon seal of approval, and help navigate the relationship with license holders DC Comics to the betterment of the gameplay experience.



Choose to be a hero (or villain) and you better behave like one! The "iconics" (Superman, Batman, Lex Luther, etc.) will butt into your experience through a picture-in-picture window and express their displeasure.

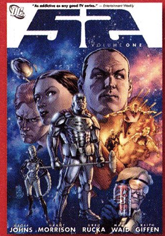
"Jim helps us with DC to explain why the Bat Cave needs to be part of the game, why players have to go in, see all of it, and attack or defend it for game purposes," explains Blakely of how the relationship traverses beyond art sign-off. So, as a hero you'll help Batman defend, or as a villain attempt to storm the most inner of DC universe inner sanctums, but only get to the key, core areas at a suitably advanced level. To ensure that visual credibility, the team at Lee's Wildstorm studio has created some 1,300 to 1,400 concept art pieces for the game, covering characters and locations to retain a visual consistency familiar to all fans of a franchise that has endured for some 70 years.

ACTION STATIONS

Crucial question: would a PS3 gamer commit to a traditional-style MMO? Cao accurately suggests that for the most part that audience would expect a superhero game first. "Our main task wasn't to reinvent, but just build what the audience has already seen in their imagination," he says. Ensuring an adherence to a superhero action game mentality, the SOE team has brought on board Jens Andersen, formerly lead designer of *Star Wars Battlefront.* See, you won't play as Superman, Batman, or any of the other iconic characters of the universe, but you will fight alongside them, aid them, hinder them (if that's your choice). You will get communication directly from them if your actions are dictating a bent inconsistent with your initial character creation choices (you pick hero or villain at the outset, it's not dictated organically by how you actually interact with the world and characters).

Character Creation itself involves choosing between three core game mechanics that will succinctly impact the form and style of your super-person. Your Power Type (ice, fire, electricity, etc.) informs the core energy source of your super-dom, while the Power Source (a one-handed or two-handed weapon, bow, dual wield, and numerous other options) delivers those

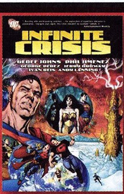
The Writer


"As addictive as any good TV series." — Entertainment Weekly
DC
52
VOLUME ONE
JOHNS MORRISON RUCKA WAID GIFFEN

SO HERE'S WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN: the DC universe, variously home to such dominant personalities as Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, Lex Luther (the list goes on and on) is now suddenly infused with a gargantuan batch of new heroes and villains. Why? What cataclysmic event(s) has called into existence so many new faces? A veteran of some of the DC Comics' most revered event-focused stories, Geoff Johns, will pen the overarching story that propels *DCUO's* über-plot.

As one of four authors of the revered *52* series (see Essential DC Reading boxout), Johns' finger has been on the pulse of this environment through many monumental events, and that's what we expect from the *DCUO* story. In fact, it's likely that events generated out of the *DCUO* evolution (including the role played by significant player-created heroes and villains), will make it into actual comics, potentially directed along new storylines by the story threads crafted by Johns.

We'll have more on his involvement, and teasers on how you could shape the DC universe, in coming issues.



Essential DC reading

If you want to get caught up with the DC universe shenanigans (it's not as straightforward as you might think, what with the *Infinite Crisis*, the *52*, and that cross-dimensional activity) add these to the shopping list for the next visit to ye local comic emporium.

IDENTITY CRISIS A shocking murder of a loved one and the threat of further harm puts the DC heroes on the highest alert, and a shocking act from the JLA's past comes to light.

COUNTDOWN TO INFINITE CRISIS These stories occur in parallel, all leading up to the Infinite Crisis event.

THE OMAC PROJECT C-list hero Blue Beetle investigates an inconsistency, and sets off a chain of events that will have a devastating effect on the DCU. Plus, Batman no longer trusts his fellow heroes after the events of *Identity Crisis.* When his monitoring creation falls into the wrong hands, the entire world is put into cataclysmic danger.

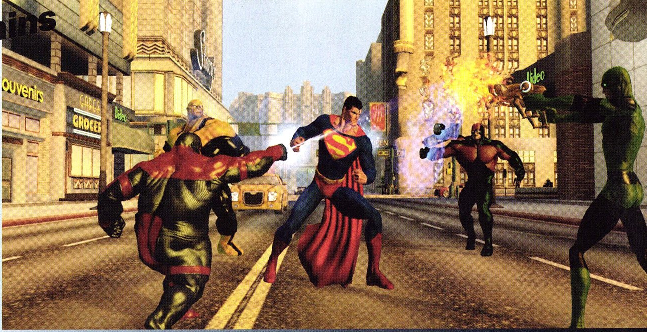
VILLAINS UNITED After the questionable actions of JLA members (see *Identity Crisis)* are revealed, Lex Luthor creates his own Society of villains. Willingly, or for fear of their lives, almost all the DCU villains join. As a resistance group consisting of Catman, Deadshot, Scandal, Cheshire, Ragdoll, and Parademon continues to evade subjugation, the team quickly learns even their mysterious benefactor Mockingbird won't be able to save them from a Luthor that won't take no for an answer.

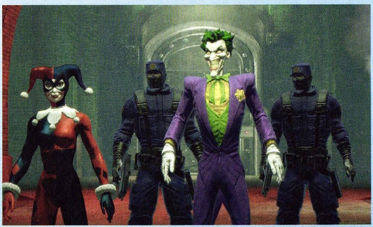
INFINITE CRISIS COMPANION One-shot stories that continue *Day of Vengeance, OMAC, Rann-Thanagar War,* and *Villains United.*

INFINITE CRISIS As the entire DCU seems on the edge of collapse, forgotten champions return. They feel their self-sacrifice was wasted on a world gone wrong, and they'll stop at nothing to make things right.

52 vol. 1-4 A cast of lesser-known heroes must find themselves and rise to the cataclysmic events that are building in a year where Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman are gone.

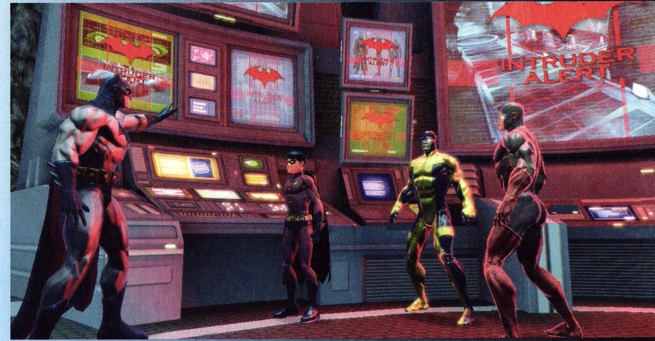
Plus:
BATMAN: FACE THE FACE
BATMAN: KILLING JOKE
BATMAN HUSH
THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN

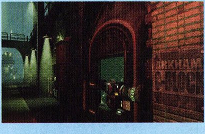


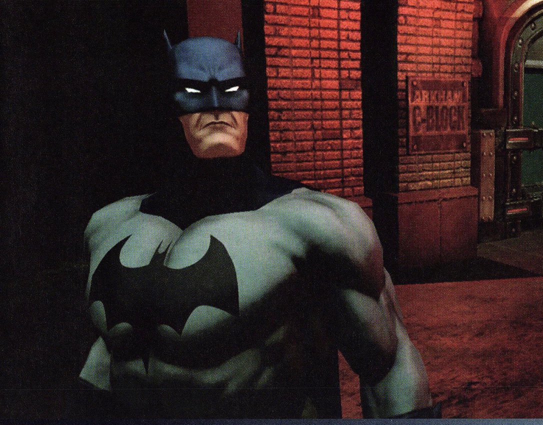


In the combat segments we witnessed, characters could be stunned, trapped, and ensnared by a variety of nefarious means. (Or perform the trapping, ensnaring, and otherwise movement hindering…)

Instanced scenarios will shift direction mid-mission to ensure the heroes and villains are alert. One example, involving Black Atom and his wife Isis begins as a classic PvP conflict between the good and bad guys. But the objectives will shift mid-event and turn the encounter into one where heroes may have to ally with villains to defeat the mutual environmental threat.







What would Brainiac do?

BRANDON ZUERN HAS THE BEST JOB IN THE WORLD. "A comic book fan's dream come true," says the former manager (and current part-time employee) of Austin Books and Comics Store. Zuerne struck up conversations with the people that kept coming into his store and ordering 10 copies of the same DC issue. "You only need to read one to get it, I told 'em," but the chat, and Zuerne directing them to the best comics to illustrate the DC characters, style, and storylines ultimately led to him being offered a job by SOE as Continuity Designer.

"As a designer I can get pulled into anything," Zuern says of his role on the team, "we need signs for Metropolis, what do they look like? What characters can we use in this scenario? What kind of things does Brainiac do?" Zuern's crammed office space is shared with two other people, and is bursting at the seams with DC comic books used for reference in directing the content and style of the game's levels. An additional storage closet is lined with trade paperbacks, and comic boxes arrange the vast catalogue of stories into manageable order. While artist Jim Lee directs all the conceptual visual identity of this interactive DC universe, the game designers have to craft locations with the correct flow and functionality to make fun in-world experiences. To that end, the core shape of a city block, underground lair, and even the Bat Cave are built in the *Unreal* level editing engine. Non-interactive elements are placed in grey while destructible pieces (lampposts, signs, pillars, etc.) are placed in red, and respawn points in blue. Images of these locations are then sent to Lee's Wildstorm studio where his team (five full-timers are dedicated to *DCUO)* sketch out overlays of detail that ensure consistency and adherence to DC canon across every scene. SOE's artists then translate those concepts into in-game textures, bringing to vibrant 3D life the static 2D comic panels.

effects. Rounding out the key traits is your movement style, be it flying, super-speed, or having the ability to run up and down walls (among others). Then, your "Type" choice, providing delectable options such as Acrobat, Striker, Dreadnaught, Bouncer, Scout, Stonewall, and Thug establishes your body shape and size. The combination of these elements, along with a console-focused control method whereby you take four acquired abilities into each encounter, allows you to switch "classes" at almost any point. By the time you're getting in line with the various factions ("dozens" are planned, including the Inner Gang, Firm, Legion of the Amazons, LexCorp) you're likely to have found a bunch of buddies (maybe as part of the planned Leagues and Legions guild system), and know what kits you can combine for flexible "class"-style performance.

Taking four core powers into combat won't be as limiting as it sounds, since you'll still have your core combat skills based on your key powers. And while levels, powers, and stats will all impact your abilities in the world, your own twitch skills will play a crucial role on the streets (underground lairs, dingy alleyways, rooftops). "Because of the physics system there's more reaction to and dependence on your own skills," says Blakely of a piece of the technology underpinning this mammoth undertaking. That engine is already playable, part of what Senior Producer Wes Yanagi describes as the Scrum process, whereby the game is played by the internal team on a regular (almost daily) basis. "One thing we learned from our previous lives is to play early and play often," adds Blakely, "so we don't make assumptions and then have to tweak many pieces."

UNIVERSAL APPEAL

Balancing the expectations of an audience familiar to MMO-style gameplay along with those expecting a superhero action game won't be easy. As heroes pursue Cases and villains engage in Capers you'll still visit familiar locations such as Arkham Asylum, the Bat Cave, Star Labs, and the Daily Planet. Along the way you'll compare and contrast the bright, open, upward-facing architecture of Metropolis with the dingy, downtrodden morass of Gotham City. Alongside the Watchtower, other locations will be revealed in more detail over the course of the ongoing development cycle.

Without typical RPG stats (how do you define who has more strength between Batman and Superman?) the loot you earn will affect and improve your twitch combat chances.

Similarly, many of the more in-depth MMO features and functions will be refined. As it stands, random wandering "bad guys" won't drop loot, instead you're rewarded for completing encounters and finishing events. This effort to encourage grouping goes so far as to reward passers-by who join in your fight and help out in any way. "We've spent the last year and a half focusing on the moment-to-moment gameplay experience," explains Blakely. The pay-off is devising a combat system where "death" is merely a knockout blow, and with one button press you can bail on the action, or quickly respawn.

The background server mechanics will also let you jump servers (including to ones devised for player-versus-player combat) to team up with your friends as quickly and smoothly as possible. Accessibility for the console crowd while maintaining the depth and persistent setting so critical to committed world attachment is a significant challenge not lost on the experienced crew within SOE's Austin office. You simply don't screw up Batman, Superman, and friends, and ably assisted by the visionary style of DC veteran Jim Lee, and the story crafting expertise of Geoff Jones, really, *DC Universe Online* is undeniably positioned as one of the most amibitious and vital games in the PlayStation 3 portfolio. ■

If criminals are committing crimes in a bad part of town, they won't attract much attention. But in Metropolis, the police will descend on infractions post haste. Bigger events will attract more powerful police, and hero vs. villain PvP encounters could emerge.

VALKYRIA CHRONICLES

BY GARY STEINMAN

The year is 1935, and the entire continent of Europa is about to become embroiled in a deadly conflict that even the neutral Principality of Gallia won't be able to avoid.

Platform: PS3

AVAILABLE: November

GENRE: RPG

PUBLISHER: Sega

DEVELOPER: Sega

It began, like all wars do, over something precious—in this case, Ragnite, a luminescent ore that powers everything from the lamp at your bedside table to mammoth war machines that leave wide swathes of devastation in their wake. But with scarcity comes desire, and the constant consumption of Ragnite led to an ever-diminishing supply of the essential ore. Soon enough, the Ragnite-hungry East Europan Imperial Alliance—also known as the Empire—launched its first volley into the Ragnite-rich lands of the democratic Atlantic Federation. With its superior might, the Empire stormed the front and quickly took much of the Atlantic states for its own.

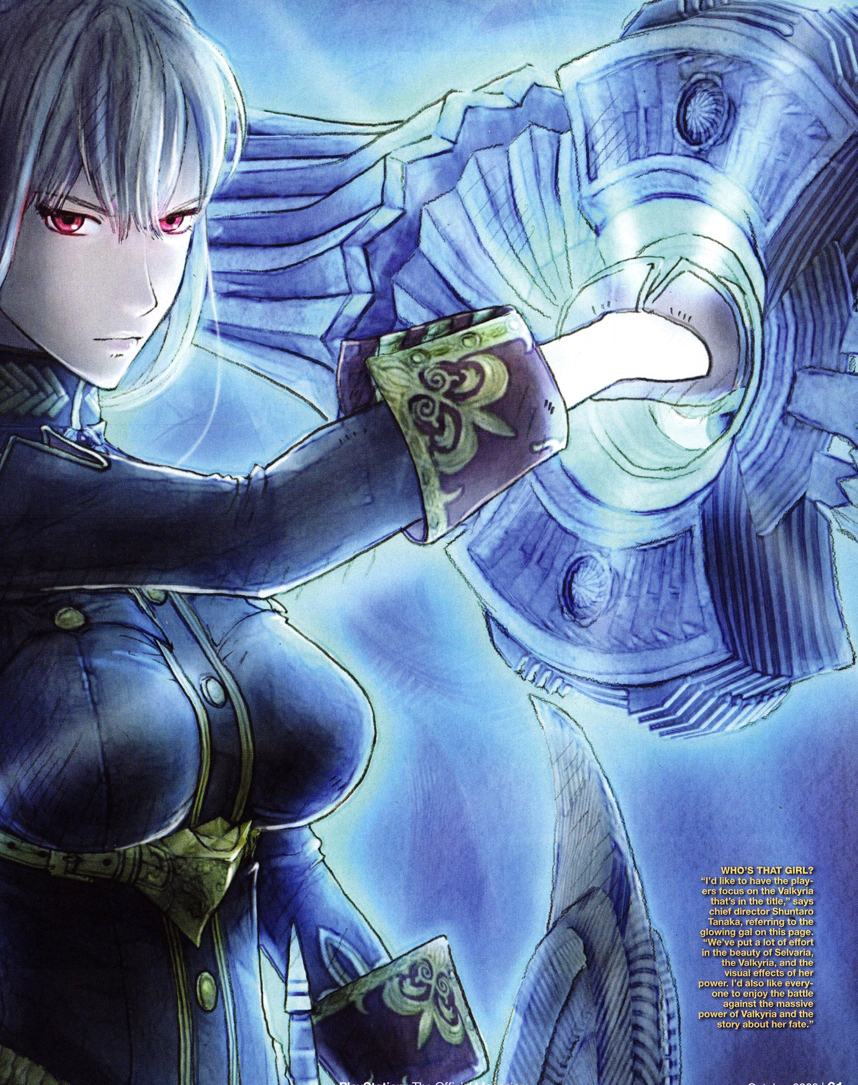
But it wasn't enough. It never is.

Gallia—a small, peaceful nation—happens to sit on one of the biggest supplies of Ragnite. And the Empire wants it all.

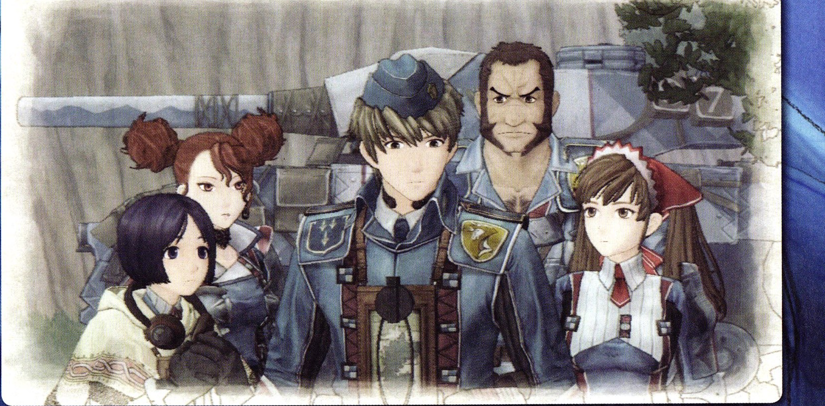
If any of this sounds familiar, that's because it is. *Valkyria Chronicles* is a uniquely Japanese re-imagining of Europe in the throes of World War II, with some seemingly modern themes tossed in. (Try substituting "Ragnite" for "oil" and you can easily see this as a parable for our current global conflicts.) *Valkyria* is also a uniquely Japanese take on the roleplaying game—a JRPG, if you will—with a tried-and-true style of storytelling that surrounds a tactical battle system, complete with all the familiar trappings like turn-based combat, customizable characters, and an incredible depth of gameplay options at your disposal.

And yet, *Valkyria* is also different. This is a JRPG like no other, with a new-fangled visual style and a tantalizing take on strategic combat. Gone is the flat grid that underpins past iterations of this game mechanic, replaced with a full 3D field of battle in which the environment plays a key strategic role. Gone are the soldiers who politely wait their turn; the enemy will fire at you as you move into position, so you better know where you want to go before you get there. Gone are the goofy (yet beloved) sprites, replaced with 3D characters that, paradoxically, look more like living, breathing anime characters.

So while *Valkyria Chronicles* might seem at first like your typical JRPG—a safe and comfortable but commonplace experience—it's anything but. Instead, *Valkyria* is a JRPG unlike any other; at once familiar but altogether new.



WHO'S THAT GIRL?
"I'd like to have the players focus on the Valkyria that's in the title," says chief director Shuntaro Tanaka, referring to the glowing gal on this page. "We've put a lot of effort in the beauty of Selvaria, the Valkyria, and the visual effects of her power. I'd also like everyone to enjoy the battle against the massive power of Valkyria and the story about her fate."



Meet Squad 7, led by Lt. Welkin Gunther, a former student of animal sociology—perfect for leading troops in combat.

Before we dive into what makes *Valkyria Chronicles* so special, allow me a moment of self-indulgent ranting.

I hate the term "JRPG." Hate it, hate it. HATE it.

It's what linguists call a retronym: a makeshift word or phrase where a modifier is tacked on to the original word to help denote the original meaning. Think "terrestrial radio"—before the invention of satellite radio, it was all just "radio."

And so it is with "JRPG." Because back in the early console days, there were just "RPGs," they were almost all from Japan, and they were good.

But something happened circa 2003 (videogame historians have yet to pin an exact date on this seismic event): Japanese RPGs got stale. Sure, the top few still stood out, but the vast majority was mired in trite storylines, clichéd characters, and uninspired battle systems. Meanwhile, western RPGs crawled out of the PC muck from which they were conceived and began their console ascendancy, bringing a spate of RPG-influenced shooters, adventures, and action titles, all of which unceremoniously ganged up on the once-glorious (J)RPG and cast the genre aside like yesterday's news.

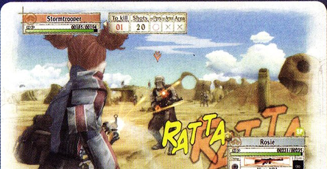
I'm not alone in these feelings. Christopher Kaminski, the U.S. producer for *Valkyria,* agrees: "If anything has hurt the JRPG genre, all the creators of JRPGs have stuck close to a proven formula that deserves a little refresh," he concedes. In the case of *Valkyria,* Kaminski was attracted to the project precisely because of its uniqueness. "First of all, the game looks stunning," he gushes. "I'm not just saying that because I'm the producer. It's a universal sentiment. Everyone who sees the game comments on its beauty."

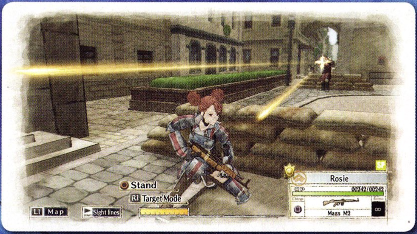
"The second great thing about the game is the combat system. I've always been a personal fan of tactical games, but I feel that the genre has stagnated over the years. The BLiTZ battle system does a fantastic job of bringing a new sense of urgency and excitement," says Kaminski.

Perhaps these same sentiments helped motivate the Japanese dev team to push the boundaries of traditional JRPGs. After all, the game really does look spectacular, sort of like a virtual Studio Ghibli animated masterpiece, with an inspired mix of rough pencil-sketch lines, soft watercolor imagery, and sharp 3D details in the landscapes and costumes. "The graphics engine, CANVAS, is a technology that enables hand-drawn watercolor-like pictures to move in real-time," explains producer Ryutaro Nonaka. "The movies alone are new to the eyes, but there's also a whole new technology where you can actually move these pictures in the battles."

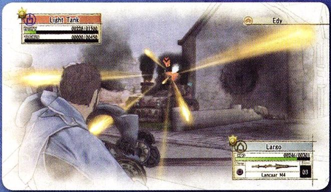
Add to the visuals two themes that typically aren't found in JRPGs—"World War II" and "military"—both of which are far more common in U.S. games; chief director Shuntaro Tanaka feels that this fact will lend the game a more universal appeal. Yet it's a profoundly Japanese take on these two western themes: "Most of the war games currently out in the market tend to pursue reality," Tanaka says. "However, by using the hand-drawn style of graphics, we feel that we are able to retain a unique fantasy atmosphere." According to Tanaka, this juxtaposition is essential for capturing another key theme of the game: how individuals can rise up despite the atrocities of war—a celebration of humanity in the face of inhumanity.

Strong but limited in range, stormtroopers are a great option on the front lines of combat. Their weaponry ranges from sub-machine guns to flamethrowers.





Cover plays a major role in battle. Duck behind sandbags and you'll minimize damage to yourself while inflicting maximum damage to your exposed enemies.



When squaring off against tanks, nothing tops a Lancer, a soldier whose power is matched by his defense. Nothing, that is, except for another tank...

Yet despite its new elements, *Valkyria* is still a Japanese RPG that longtime genre fans should find satisfying: "The battle system and graphics may be different, but *Valkyria Chronicles* definitely fits in to the mold of JRPGs when you look at the mixture of the storyline and game system," says Nonaka. Tanaka adds: "I'm sure that the JRPG fans will enjoy this game."

WAR GAMES

Stunning good looks aside, *Valkyria* is most notable for its new twist on a traditional battle system. Funny thing is, the combat innovations were inspired by the storyline, rather than a desire to create something new. "Originally, we were thinking of using a chess-like system, typical to tactical RPGs," Nonaka explains. Tanaka jumps in: "The idea of this game is to depict war through the eyes of the members of the squad. In order to do that, we needed the scenes to come alive—troops running through the battlefield, dodging bullets. This is when we included the action into the simulation and formed the BLiTZ battle system."

Here's how a battle goes down: After watching a selection of cutscenes, followed by some time spent at headquarters fiddling with your squad (eventually you'll choose from 100 possible recruits, of which you can have 20 active members); training your soldiers (by spending experience points on each of the five major classes); and developing weapons, armor, and enhancements for your soldiers and tank (allocating cash to the relevant items), you'll receive a briefing about the conflict ahead. You'll learn exactly what your commanders know: details about the battlefield, information about potential enemies, and the parameters for victory. You'll then position your troops, and the battle begins. That's when it gets really interesting.

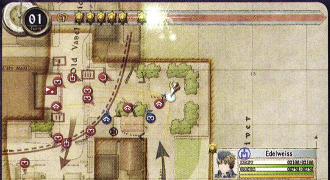
With an allotment of Command Points, you can send your soldiers into the fray. Each soldier has a limited range of movement, along with one possible action per turn. While that seems standard enough, in *Valkyria Chronicles* all movement occurs in real time. That means that if you stumble into an enemy, he will fire at you until you either run away, duck for cover, or fire back. And the same goes for the bad guys: If an enemy soldier moves into your line of fire, you'll shoot at him before he even takes an action. "The thrill of running through the gunfire is a new layer added to the strategy," says Tanaka.

The fully 3D fields also serve to enhance the real-time action. Gone is the "fog of war," replaced by lines of sight based on what your soldiers can actually (gasp) see. Send a long-range scout into enemy territory and you might uncover a slew of hostile combatants right around the ridge—but you'll spot them only when they first cross into your line of sight. Or hide in some tall grass and you can remain unseen even as enemy soldiers march by. Better yet, position a sniper in a tower and you can pick off enemies who won't even know what hit them. Whether you're charging into battle or skulking behind cover, the battlefield plays a strategic role that makes logical sense based on what you really, truly see directly in front of you.

The game also offers an unparalleled flexibility for the genre, allowing you to allocate your Command Points as you see fit—so if you want to spend them all on just one soldier, you can. Picking the correct soldiers for each mission can also sway the battle, as each recruit has a unique set of potentials that can boost or depress their stats depending on the situation. And that's not all: Troopers also have affinities for one another, so if you can find the perfect selection of Potentials and friendships, you'll earn a significant advantage. "We pursued what makes tactical simulation so fun—flexibility for players to come up with their own tactics," Tanaka says. "I think it is very rare to find a game where players have so many different ways to complete a mission."

Rare, indeed...yet just what the genre so desperately needs. *Valkyria Chronicles* includes enough genre-busting innovation wrapped up in comforting conventions that it might just make me fall in love with the term JRPG. ■

Check out the command map for a full overview of the battlefield—although you'll only see what your troops can actually see.



Skies of Valkyria

Valkyria Chronicles includes an all-star development team. A few key members:

RYUTARO NONAKA, producer. Worked on a PS2 title called *Nightshade*. "It was a 3D action game and we brought what we learned from there, such as the extensity of battle maps and controls." Also a veteran (along with several other team members) of the beloved *Sakura Taisen* series, "so the staff of *Valkyria Chronicles* has a track record of games with epic storylines," he says.

SHUNTARO TANAKA, chief director. "I was also a director of *Skies of Arcadia*. Like with *Arcadia*, I like to create a fantasy atmosphere with a motif of history in our world. *Valkyria Chronicles* fits in the mold of my specialty. The game design of *Arcadia*—fighting with characters of different abilities—is something I brought to this title." (*Arcadia* fans, be sure to keep an eye out for Vyse and Aika, both of whom are playable members of the squad!)

HITOSHI SAKIMOTO, composer. When you need an epic orchestral soundtrack with military underpinnings, Sakimoto is your man. Best known recently for his work on *Final Fantasy XII*, Sakimoto is also the composer behind the best game soundtrack ever: *Final Fantasy Tactics*. To this soundtrack, Sakimoto added some Celtic folk instruments along with trumpet solos meant to evoke marching music.

SHOWDOWN LAN 2008

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GAMERS ON THE GO
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Konami's must-have puzzlers—
EMOTICONS
and
GOLD MINER

KONAMI

INSIDE:

Hellboy: The Stench of Evil
The supernatural super-hero raises hell in this action-packed game

Dance Dance Revolution Mobius
Let your fingers do the dancing in Konami's mobile version of the arcade phenomenon

Silent Hill: Orphan
October is the month for chills and thrills with this latest chapter in the survival horror series

Out this September!

Dance Dance Revolution Mobius

Let your fingers do the dancing!

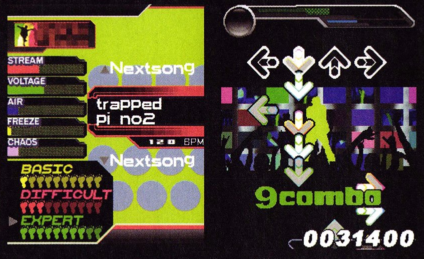
***Dance Dance Revolution* took the arcades by storm in the late '90s, and then burst into the living room** on the consoles, inspiring gamers the world over to get off the couch and bust-a-move. The franchise has spawned dozens of versions and sold millions of copies, and fans are still clamoring for more, more, more!

Konami is listening, and the latest mobile version, *Dance Dance Revolution Mobius* will rock your cell this September! Packed with all-new music, the addition of power-ups, and the ability to play head-to-head against your friends wirelessly—a first for the mobile series—*Mobius* will bring the total *DDR* experience to your phone like never before.

It may seem strange at first to play a dancing game on your cell, as you don't actually "dance" but rather hit keys in rhythm to the music. However, until there's a way to throw down a virtual dance mat on the subway, this is the next best thing—and it's much more addictive than it may sound. And, like actual dancing, timing and a good feel for the beat are keys to scoring well.

Do you have rhythm? Pick up *Dance Dance Revolution Mobius* and prove it!

SCREEN SHOT Every effort was made to make sure *DDR Mobius* rings true with the look and feel of its console and arcade bigger brothers.



CARRIERS:

- AT&T
- T-Mobile
- Verizon

INTERVIEW

DELVING DEEPER

Boogie down with Lead Designer Tyrone Rodriquez as he answers our *DDR Mobius* questions.

How is *DDR Mobius* different from previous mobile versions?

We're making a big push to give it that real *DDR* feel. The menus are inspired by a lot of the motion and effects from the arcade and console versions of *DDR*. And the music is all-new, but also takes a few pages out of the *DDR* notebook.

What were the biggest development challenges you faced in bringing this game to mobile?

Trying to make a *DDR* game feel like *DDR* is one of the biggest challenges on mobile. When you're going from two feet to presumably one thumb, there's a big gap there. Our job and challenge was to give the songs and steps that authentic feel that would make someone instantly recognize this as a *DDR* game and enjoy it.

What are some features unique to the mobile format that you want DDR fans to know about?

We have 12 songs; they're all-new to *DDR* and official from Konami—that alone should get the attention of the *DDR* fan. But we also plan on releasing regular download packs so that players can enjoy all types of tunes. We plan to include licensed music as well as tunes from past *DDR* games.

Also, this is the first *DDR* mobile game to let you go head-to-head against a real person wirelessly. Scores will be maintained on a global leader board that can be viewed directly from a phone.

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NOW IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND.
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TEXT "HELLBOY" TO 566264 TO GET IT NOW.
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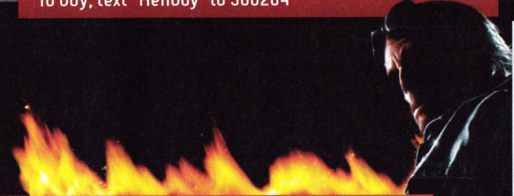
To buy, text "Hellboy" to 566264



Hellboy: The Stench of Evil

The hero may be ugly, but the game is not

The ugly-and-proud-of it badass known as Hellboy has enjoyed a rabid cult following since first appearing in Mike Mignola's comics in 1993. He's come a long way since then, appearing in a series of miniseries and one-shot comics, animated shows, and two big-budget films. Now, with "Hellboy fever" at an all-time high, he's kicking butt and taking names in *Hellboy: The Stench of Evil* for mobile.

This colorful 2D platform-style game is jam-packed with all the action and attitude fans should expect—and then some! The Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense calls upon our favorite red-skinned demon to investigate some mysterious happenings in New York City. Naturally, Hellboy starts his quest in the dark, dank sewers, which eventually leads to a mythological underworld filled with ancient Indian spirits, shamans, and Nazi mystics—all fodder for our unlikely hero's fists, guns, and patented "rage attacks". (Trust us, you don't want to be on this crimson fella's bad side when he gets really, really angry....)

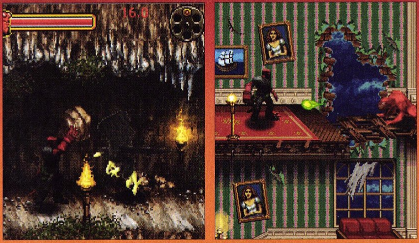
As Hellboy, you must fight, climb, and jump your way through the game's 12 massive interactive levels to get to the bottom of things. Along the way, you'll uncover hidden items, push barrels or pick up and toss crates to take out multiple enemies, and use your impressive brawn—and brains—to outwit demonic level bosses.

Saving the world from the forces of evil? It's all in a day's work for Hellboy!

CARRIERS:

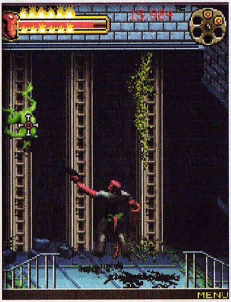
- AT&T
- T-Mobile
- Verizon

SCREEN SHOT



The rich, colorful 2D graphics were inspired by the comic series, and *Hellboy* moves with a fluid, catlike grace that looks ripped from the movies.

INTERVIEW



DELVING DEEPER

Jim Bradbury, executive director of mobile production at Konami, answers our burning *Hellboy* questions.

What was it like working with Mike Mignola on *Hellboy: The Stench of Evil*, and how much input did Mike have on the game?

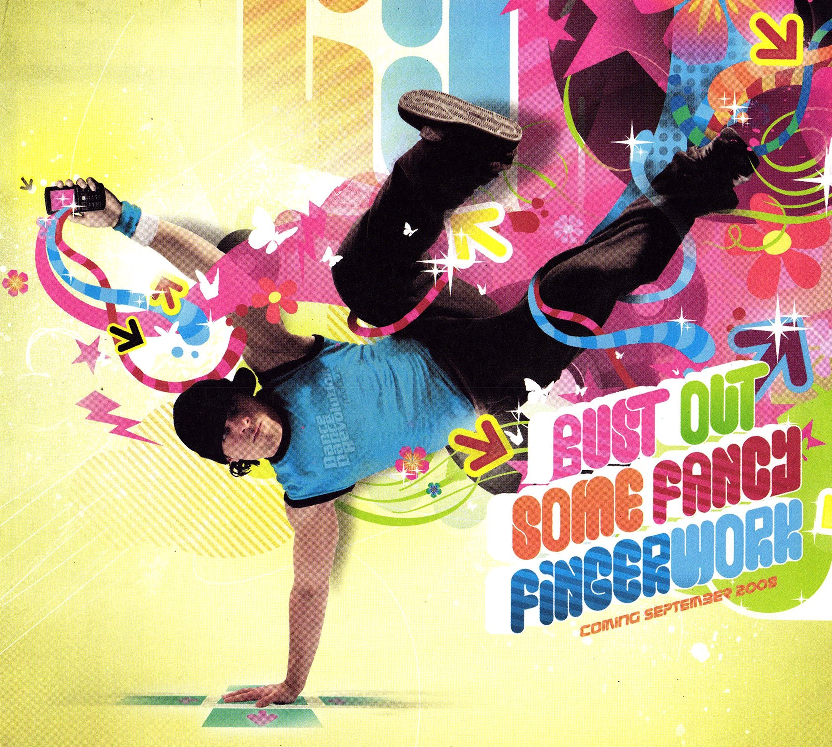
Working with Mike was a cool experience. He had his hands full with the movie coming out but was able to review and provide feedback on all the essentials needed for our development process: story treatment, script, art approval, and final play-through approval.

Tells us about the game's story—does it tie into the latest movie?

The mobile game has a unique and original storyline. This is actually the first time that a *Hellboy* storyline is based on North American Indian mythology. There are no tie-ins with *The Golden Army*.

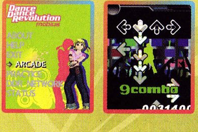
What was the greatest challenge in developing *Hellboy* for the mobile phone?

The biggest concern was to ensure that we made a game that "felt" like it belonged in the *Hellboy* world. We actually had an entirely separate *Hellboy* mobile game almost completed in 2006 that was canceled because it wasn't getting to where we needed to go from a quality standpoint. Once the creative juices were reset, we revised our general concept, selected a new engine technology and then re-developed everything from scratch.


Dance Dance Revolution mobius
BUST OUT
SOME FANCY
FINGERWORK
COMING SEPTEMBER 2008

Dance Dance Revolution™ mobius

DDR HAS GONE MOBILE.


Dance Dance Revolution mobius
ABOUT
HELP
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ARCADE
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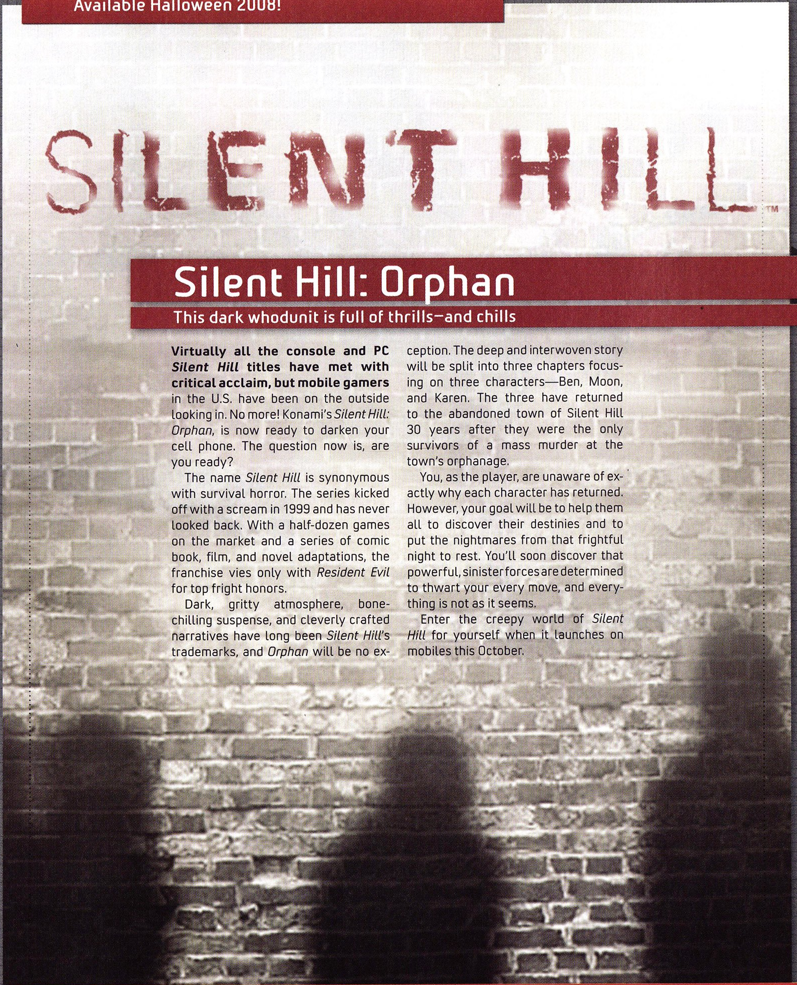
Available Halloween 2008!



Silent Hill: Orphan

This dark whodunit is full of thrills—and chills

Virtually all the console and PC *Silent Hill* titles have met with critical acclaim, but mobile gamers in the U.S. have been on the outside looking in. No more! Konami's *Silent Hill: Orphan*, is now ready to darken your cell phone. The question now is, are you ready?

The name *Silent Hill* is synonymous with survival horror. The series kicked off with a scream in 1999 and has never looked back. With a half-dozen games on the market and a series of comic book, film, and novel adaptations, the franchise vies only with *Resident Evil* for top fright honors.

Dark, gritty atmosphere, bone-chilling suspense, and cleverly crafted narratives have long been *Silent Hill*'s trademarks, and *Orphan* will be no exception. The deep and interwoven story will be split into three chapters focusing on three characters—Ben, Moon, and Karen. The three have returned to the abandoned town of Silent Hill 30 years after they were the only survivors of a mass murder at the town's orphanage.

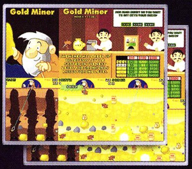
You, as the player, are unaware of exactly why each character has returned. However, your goal will be to help them all to discover their destinies and to put the nightmares from that frightful night to rest. You'll soon discover that powerful, sinister forces are determined to thwart your every move, and everything is not as it seems.

Enter the creepy world of *Silent Hill* for yourself when it launches on mobiles this October.

Remember,

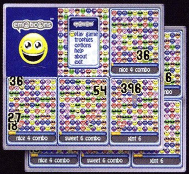
at some point you may actually have to use
your phone to call someone.

Gold Miner


Gold Miner
Gold Miner

Text Goldminer to 566264 to get it now.
Visit KonamiMobile.com for more info.
Standard rates apply.

emoticons™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KONAMI

Now Serving... Everyone! From survival horror to casual puzzle games, Konami does it all

We've shown you three killer A-list mobile games that demonstrate Konami's commitment to delivering hardcore gaming action. However, Konami is just as focused on serving up more casual options that have appeal for gamers of all ages. Need proof? Check out *Emoticons* and *Gold Miner*!

EMOTICONS

Puzzle fun sure to put a smile on your face

To buy, text "Emoticons" to 566264

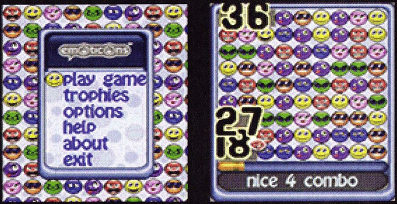
ROTFL! *Emoticons* is one of those games that takes literally seconds to learn and start playing but is challenging to master—and quite hard to put down. (You've been warned!)

Each level, the game screen fills up with various emoticons—you know, those cutesy smiley faces we all like to put in our IMs and text messages. When you click on an emoticon with the cursor it is "in play" and the object is to then click on strings of connected emoticons of the same type, which clears room for new emoticons. The more you manage to clear in one click, the more points you score. When the score meter fills up, you clear the level and advance.

There are four modes of play—classic, timed, challenge, and puzzle—and high scores earn you trophies. Plus, there are a few hidden secrets to uncover, such as a romance between a certain pair of emoticons. SW33T!

CARRIERS:
T-Mobile
Verizon

SCREEN SHOT *Emoticons* is a simple-to-play, hard-to-master puzzler that provides hours of brain-flexing good times.

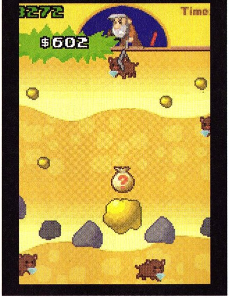


GOLD MINER

A 24-karat treasure on your cell phone

To buy, text "Gold" to 566264

SCREEN SHOT Use your claw and reel to mine treasure—and avoid hazards—in *Gold Miner*!



This gem (sorry) of a game conjures up memories of trying to grab prizes with the crane at the penny arcade. Or, if you're a bit too young to have experienced that classic money burner, think of the timeless "claw" scene in the pizza parlor from the movie *Toy Story*.

You play as a grizzled old miner who must use your claw and reel to mine gold and other treasures—diamonds, gems, bags o' cash, etc.—from the ground. The claw swings back and forth and you cast it out like a fishing lure, aiming for the juiciest targets while trying to avoid hazards like dynamite and other worthless items. The heavier the object you grab, the longer it takes to retrieve. (Just like in real life!) You'll have to choose your targets wisely as you must earn a set amount of cash before time expires to advance.

The goal, naturally, is to earn as much money as you can and retire to a life of pampered luxury. Well, one can always dream!

CARRIERS:
T-Mobile
Verizon

Reviews

Scores | Analysis | Buying Advice | Hardware

RATINGS

★★★★★ **LEGENDARY**
A game so amazing, the entire PTOM staff recommends it. A must buy!

★★★★½ **SUPERB**
Not quite a timeless classic, but one of the finest of its breed.

★★★★ **GREAT!**
A finely crafted, thoroughly enjoyable experience. Worth your time and money.

★★★½ **SOLID**
A strong game. We noticed some flaws, but there's more to like than loathe.

★★★ **ENJOYABLE**
If the topic/license/style is your thing, there's enough to keep you entertained.

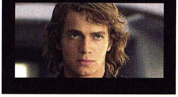
★★½ **MEDIOCRE**
An equal blend of sweet and sour. Discerning gamers can find better.

★★ **SCARRED**
A smattering of entertainment hidden amongst an abundance of flaws.

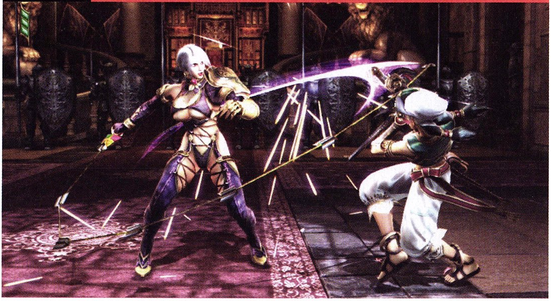
★½ **FRUSTRATING**
"Argh!" will be the self-created soundtrack of this game. No thank you.

★ **PAINFUL**
We played it so you don't have to. Now you owe us cookies.

½ **BROKEN**
Hey, it comes in a free plastic box! Wee!



GAME of the month Soulcalibur IV p 78



Meet the experts delivering your buying advice

The PTOM team is back from E3 and ready to report on all the debauchery...er, games we saw.

ROB SMITH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The Who! The real life (what's left of them) band didn't play a "give me the check and we're gone" set; they rocked for nearly two hours. The Who! (And Ringo Starr's son on drums). That's Rob's memory of E3 2008. He mentioned something about games…apparently there were games, but The Who! played a huge set at the *Rock Band 2* party. At E3. Damn, this industry is cool. (Sometimes).

NOW PLAYING: *NFL Head Coach 09, Super Stardust HD, FIFA 09, NHL 09, MLB 08*

TERESA DUN
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Teresa admits this makes her sound like a lazy bum, but the best part about E3 was that it forced her to walk two to three miles each day—that's more exercise than she gets in a year! The tempting donuts and cookies lurking at every booth gave her self-control a workout, too. Game-wise, *LittleBigPlanet, Fat Princess,* and *Flower* impressed her the most.

NOW PLAYING: *PixelJunk Eden, Disgaea 3, Soulcalibur IV*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

Since the rest of the crew was off to E3 for a week, Ken took what essentially amounted to his summer vacation. He mowed the lawn, barbequed sausages, went to the pool with the kids, watched *The Sopranos* finale finally, and drank tons of espresso. And *he* got to play games for a change! Quite relaxing. But now that the editors are back and blowing deadlines, paradise has begun to fade away like a mirage.

NOW PLAYING: Outdoor men's soccer, *GRID, Soulcalibur IV*

GARY STEINMAN
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Roaming the eerily empty halls of the LA convention center, Gary couldn't help but reflect on the ghosts of E3 past, a haunting bacchanal of booze, booth babes, blaring sounds, blinking lights, and…oh yeah, games. Does he really miss the old E3? Or just his long-lost youth? Gary has much to ponder, thanks to E3 2008.

NOW PLAYING: *SW: The Force Unleashed, N+, Soulcalibur IV, Valkyria Chronicles*

ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

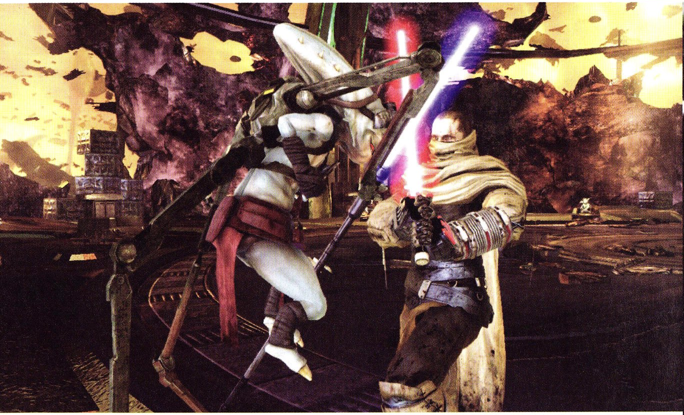
E3 2008 marked Roger's official return to the industry after an extended sabbatical. He was happy that no one responded with, "I thought you were dead!" Since *All-Star Cheer Squad* is a Wii-exclusive, his Top Five games from the show are *Mirror's Edge, Operation Flashpoint 2, Stormrise, Prince of Persia,* and *Bayonetta.*

NOW PLAYING: *MGS4, Yakuza 2, Bionic Commando Rearmed,* and I p0wn *WALL-E!*

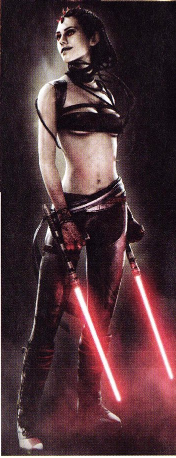
SCOTT BUTTERWORTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Though the *Rock Band 2* party was definitely the highlight of the show, Scott really enjoyed the "Into the Pixel" art gallery, which featured some really intriguing videogame-inspired artwork. How very cultured of Scott! As for the actual games at E3, his favorite was *Resident Evil 5,* but then again, he didn't get to play *Mirror's Edge* or *Fallout 3.*

NOW PLAYING: *FaceBreaker, Hail to the Chimp, B-Boy,* and public *Rock Band 2* exhibitionism



One of the first truly challenging battles came against the Jedi Kazdan Paratus, who will tear away at you like a junkyard dog.



PS3 | R

Star Wars:

The Force Unleashed

Embrace, love, feel the Dark Side

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: LucasArts DEVELOPER: LucasArts

Holy frickin' crap: I am slaughtering Wookiees.

I've just landed on the planet Kashyyyk, and I'm strolling through a hot zone swarming with ferocious furry warriors. And yet, I'm undaunted, unfazed, utterly relaxed. After all, I'm a fully Force-powered Sith Lord, and I'm way too cool to rush through the chaos; instead, I'm taking my sweet time, Force Pushing Wookiees over cliffs, zapping Wookiees with my Force Lightning, impaling Wookiees with my lightsaber, gripping, tossing, slicing, squishing...

I am Darth Vader. And I am kicking hairy ass.

So begins *Force Unleashed,* a canonical addition to the *Star Wars* saga, set between the events of *Episode III* and *Episode IV.* The game starts with Lord Vader hunting down a fugitive Jedi holed up on the mid-rim Wookiee world of Kashyyyk. It's a tempting treat, strutting in Vader's shoes—all that power, all that...evil. Indeed, this opening level sets the tone for what's to come: a deep, important, but ultimately unbalanced game, riddled with nagging problems, yet still compelling in an almost unnatural way. Then again, what do you expect from a game where you start as evil personified? Balance has never been the goal of bad people, the Force is strong, and the lure of the Dark Side is undeniably powerful.

A hunting we will go

Like many *Star Wars* stories, *Force Unleashed* soon reveals itself to be a highly personal journey, a hero's quest starring an unnamed orphan. After defeating the aforementioned fugitive Jedi, Vader takes his stunned child as a secret apprentice, hoping one day to use their combined might to betray Vader's own master, Emperor Palpatine, and so rule the galaxy.

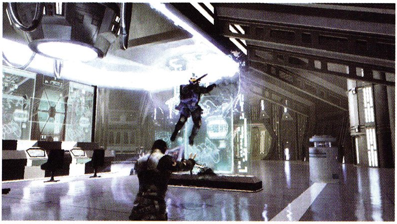
Flash forward several years, and the boy has become a loyal (but angry) young man who's initially dispatched on several missions to surreptitiously hunt down Jedi. If you think that's a cool concept, well, you're right. Remember the first time you saw Yoda fighting in *Episode II?* (I realize it's fashionable to dismiss that battle as a bit ludicrous, but please get past your jaded side and embrace your inner sense of wonder; it'd help a lot.) Now imagine feeling that same gleeful awe when you not only witness several other new Jedi in action (each with an astoundingly creative combat style) but you also get to *fight* them.

Soon enough, though, the story takes a sharp turn away from the visceral thrill of Jedi-hunting, when a vile betrayal reveals itself to be an insidious double-cross that ends up as a perfidious triple-cross, complete with a sassy love interest, an earnest quest for redemption, and possibly the coolest robot ever—the amiable but deadly holodroid, Proxy. Keep in mind that this is a *Star Wars* story, so while it certainly doesn't represent the height of literary craft, it's high-end pulp entertainment nonetheless. In other words, if you fancy yourself a *Star Wars* fan, *Force Unleashed* is absolutely essential, especially since it does a remarkable job of tying together the two movie trilogies, revealing the birth of the rebel alliance, the beginnings of the Death Star, and the inner workings of the thoroughly dysfunctional relationship between Darth Vader and Emperor Palpatine.

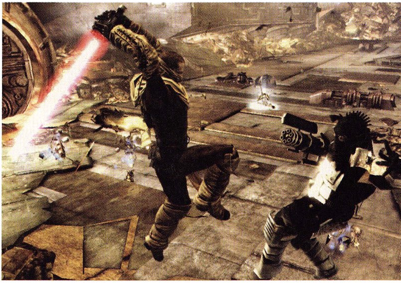
A disturbance in the Force

And yet, throughout the dozen or so hours playing through *Force Unleashed*, I couldn't help but constantly ask myself: If this weren't a *Star Wars* game, would it be at all relevant? Sure, nothing beats the rush you get from wielding extreme power—and in this game you truly are powerful, even in the early levels playing as a neophyte apprentice. (Vader chose the boy due to his natural affinity for the Force, after all.) But with all that power comes an immense imbalance in the gameplay. Why, for example, are certain bosses able to block *any* move I tossed their way, but these same foes could *always* blast through my defenses? Or why was it occasionally impossible to aim when I'd Force Grip an object and try to toss it at a baddie? (I can grab a TIE Fighter from the sky, for crissakes—you'd think I'd then be able to throw it where I please.) Another nagging irritation: Why were some basic environmental enemies *(ahem,* Imperial Purge Troopers, I'm looking at you) tougher to take down than certain mini-bosses, like lumbering AT-STs or beastly Rancors?

Furthermore, *Force Unleashed* is riddled with legacy gameplay—the kind of quirks commonplace in the 16- and 32-bit era that should be long gone by now. Take the combo system: Eventually you can unlock more moves than you'll care to memorize, but triggering the right one at the right time proves to be nigh impossible. Need to toss a Lightning Bomb? Press Triangle, then R2. But if you want to blast a Rodian Ripper with a Lightning Grenade, that's R2 then Triangle. Or, let's say you feel the urge to summon a Lightning Shield while wending your way through a wave of Shadow Troopers: that's L2 then Triangle. Confused? That's why I often defaulted to the same handful of moves, despite the larger arsenal at my disposal.



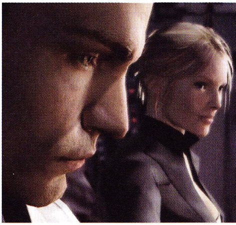
Don't feel like getting your hands dirty? Use the Force to grip and toss foes, or to grab objects and smash them into enemies. You can even grab TIE Fighters from the sky!



You can power up your lightsaber with various hidden crystals—or you could just change its color.

Levels are balanced between exploration and combat, with plenty of puzzles along the way.

But perhaps the best illustration of the outdated gameplay came at the second-to-last boss battle, when I was challenged with pulling something absurdly enormous out of the sky using the Force. After evading a wave of foes, I had to first maneuver this "object" (no spoilers!) into the *exact right* position before beginning the tough task of pulling it to the ground. Meanwhile, wave after wave of baddies washed over me, and every time I turned away to defend myself, the object returned to its former position. Sweet Gundark, why would I need to perfectly position something just so I can rip it from the sky?! More than the occasionally unclear objectives and the wildly unbalanced enemies, this moment perfectly summed up the problems I had with *Force Unleashed.*



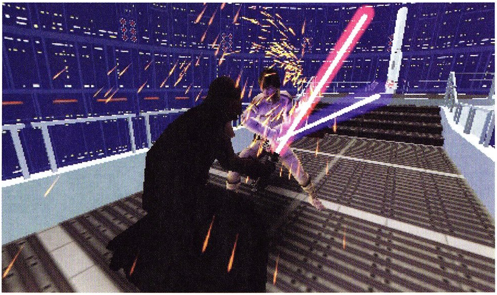
But at the end of the day, this remains a *Star Wars* game—and an essential one thanks to its compelling story and, to be fair, engaging gameplay. Despite the problems that sometimes plagued the action, I continually looked forward to the next surprise around each bend, eager to unleash the Force upon my foes, swinging my lightsaber with giddy abandon, blasting away at some incredible bosses that'll surely shock and delight *Star Wars* fans across the galaxy.

Gary Steinman

★★★½

> "A vile betrayal reveals itself to be an insidious double-cross that ends up as a perfidious triple-cross, complete with a sassy love interest"

Who's the hottest: Shaak Ti, Juno Eclipse, or Maris Brood? Tell us your pick at PTOM_letters@futureus.com!



The PSP version features a bonus mode that lets you play through "historical" moments like Luke and Vader's first duel. (You play as Vader.)

Star Wars:

The Force Unleashed

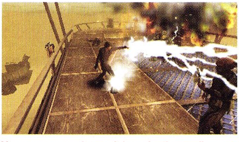
Smaller, but only a little less sexy

PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: LucasArts DEVELOPER: Krome Studios

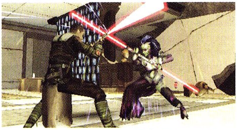
PSP | R
PS2 | R

Far from being just a watered-down port of the PS3 game, the PSP edition of *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* is an almost completely different experience. You'll still lightsaber your way through 3D levels as Vader's secret apprentice, and you'll still tear apart the environment and hurl items with your awesomely unrestrained Force powers. But while the story and settings are the same as on the PS3, the levels and the way the apprentice develops are completely different.

For example, as the Apprentice gains experience, he can apply Force Points directly to boosting his abilities (rather than "purchasing" orbs to get to the next level). He also gets Force Lightning right off the bat, which proves invaluable throughout the game's seemingly endless hack-and-slash battles. His enemies, for their part, are nowhere near as smart as their shiny PS3 cousins, although that doesn't make them any less fun to slash, impale, or smash with things you just ripped off the wall.



Your powers aren't toned down for the small screen. Check out that Force lightning!



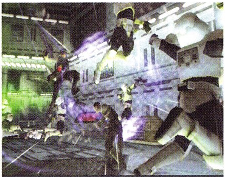
Don't look for this duel on the PS3—it's part of five missions that are exclusive to the PSP and PS2.

Indeed, the environments are flush with items you can rip from the walls (and floors and ceilings, too)—which is extremely impressive for a PSP game. The game also looks great, and the Lightsaber-heavy combat and Dark Side storyline are compelling throughout, even though the load times are long, the hit detection inconsistent, and the copious quick-time events feel shoehorned in.

The PSP edition also features a few non-PS3 levels (in the form of short repeat visits to the Jedi Temple), as well as a PSP-exclusive "Force Unleashed" mode. Built for quick play sessions, this mode enables you to pick from a handful of unlockable Jedi and Sith (ranging from Luke Skywalker to the Emperor) and then run through short, combat-focused scenarios with your Force powers cranked up to 11. It's a nice addition, giving extra longevity to what's already an enjoyable—if low-fi—take on the apprentice's story.

Mikel Reparaz

★★★★



The hardware might be aging, but the Force is as strong as ever.

Felucians are naturally sensitive to the Force, making them formidable foes to face off against.

Star Wars:

The Force Unleashed

The PS2 is still a Force to be reckoned with

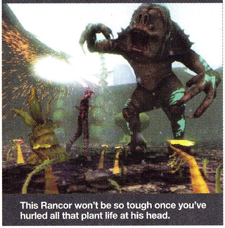
PS2 PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: LucasArts DEVELOPER: Krome Studios

The legions of people who still play on PS2s deserve better than ugly kludge-ports of PS3 games, and that's something the PS2 version of *Force Unleashed* takes to heart. Instead of trying to imitate its beefier cousin, it's almost identical to the PSP *Force Unleashed*, only with better graphics, a second analog stick, and no extra non-story modes.

Unfortunately, that also means it has the same problems as its PSP counterpart. Even so, the PS2 version is a great hack-and-slasher that's tailored to the PS2's capabilities and filled with cool stuff to throw around with the Force. If you haven't upgraded to a PS3, the action, story, and exclusive levels here won't disappoint.

Mikel Reparaz

★★★★



This Rancor won't be so tough once you've hurled all that plant life at his head.

SOME ARE SWORN TO PROTECT THE GODDESS. TO SURVIVE, YOU MUST DESTROY HER.

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PSP
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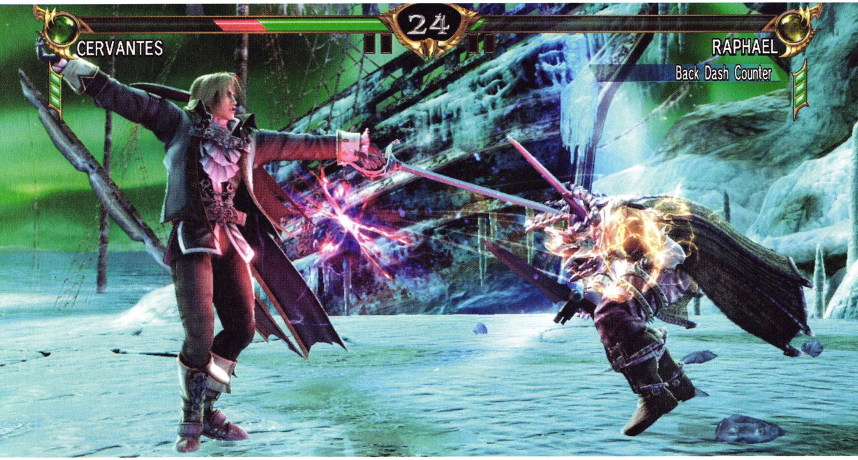


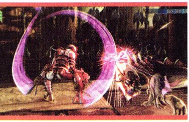
In many single-player modes, you actually control more than one character, though only one can be in play at any given time. Switch between them by pressing R1. Health regenerates for characters not in combat. Use that knowledge for a strategic edge against AI.

PS3 | R

Soulcalibur IV

A sliver of paradise for your eyes, your fingers, and possibly even your soul

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai DEVELOPER: Project Soul



I have a confession to make. The two months prior to *Soulcalibur IV's* release, I'd spent at least three hours every weekend holed up in my room, totally enrapt in my PS2 copy of *Soul Calibur III.* I was brushing up my skills. Training, if you will, like a student ninja isolated in a blizzard-torn samurai Zen-temple (yes, my analogies are as ridiculous as *SC IV's* plotlines), with a single ambition in mind: Defeat the rest of the PTOM staff. No, not just defeat. Pulverize. Send them home crying to their mamas. (Because, yes, girls *do* play games! And that includes 3D fighters! (See boxout for details about the showdown.)

Easy on the eyes

My first impression of *SC IV* was superficial: I was swept away by the stunning, hi-res backgrounds and character models. (I believe the more testosterone-fueled gamer would amend that statement to read as "stunning, hi-res, scantily clad, undressable-down to their underwear, big-breasted chicks," but I won't delve into that.) After months of *Soul Calibur III's* dated though still pretty graphics, *SC IV's* glittering weapons, textured clothing, and spectacularly-detailed backdrops were pure eye candy.

But games aren't just about graphics, and *SC IV* isn't just surface deep. After extended play, I discovered that it was just as engrossing, just as entertaining, and required just as much brainpower (though some old strategies won't work anymore) as its predecessors. Button mashing still won't get you far—studying your opponents, mastering your own combos, and calmly timing move after calculated move are still the keys to owning the battlefield, both against human opponents and the more difficult AI.

Critical destruction

SC IV introduces two changes to the basic game mechanic, one mostly optional and the other mandatory. The first is destructible equipment. *Ahem,* that's destructible equipment on female characters (but that also means clothes on male characters can be removed, too, and I caught more than one weapon-wielding man, lizard, vampire with their pants off). For battle purposes, equipment

The two Force-wielding characters, Vader and The Apprentice, have an extra Force bar beneath their health bar. It's consumed as they use Force moves (though it recharges quickly). When it's completely gone, they can still use the Force, but at the expense of health.

is divided into three slots: head, upper body, lower body. When you destroy the gear from each slot, that spot becomes more vulnerable. More importantly, equipped gear has different status effects (like HP Drain, which heals you when you land an attack on an opponent, and Venom Fang, which adds a poison effect when you knock down an enemy). When the gear is destroyed, you lose the associated bonuses. Personally, with one exception (see sidebar), I hate the addition of equipment effects. It dilutes the purity of a mano-a-womano fighter. Fortunately, you can choose between Standard (equipment effect off) and Special (effects on) in both offline and online versus modes.

The second innovation is the Soul Gauge, which is in every mode. It's a little orb on the side of the health bar that starts out green, but transforms to red if you block too often. When it starts flashing red (called Soul Crush), you're vulnerable to strong attacks, which penetrate your blocks. If the opponent then performs a Critical Finish, he destroys you in one flashy move, regardless of your health. Conversely, if you land continuous attacks on your opponent, the Gauge will turn from green to an icy blue, at which point you can press R2 for a boost.

Other than that, *SC IV* plays much like the previous *Soul Calibur* titles, though the moves have been freshened up. You can't rely on blocking as much anymore, meaning battles are even more aggressive, but the extensive arsenal of moves (a counter for every attack and block, as long as you can predict your opponent's next action, with an emphasis on combos and juggling) is still the game's heart. The online capability is one of the game's biggest draws—but the fact that I experienced occasional lag even playing online against Gary (in the same office) doesn't bode well. We experienced simultaneous slowdown, so it didn't affect the tide of battle too much, but I can only imagine the frustration if it occurs during the middle of a combo, or if the two combatants are across the country.

Even so, *Soulcalibur IV* is a well-produced, polished 3D fighter that no PS3 owner should be without, and is definitely one of the system's must-have party games. Teresa Dun

★★★★½

An optional install, which takes about 10 minutes, shortens load times. We recommend it for the impatient.

Teresa's Biased Showdown Coverage

To put it modestly, I *smoked* the rest of the staff. I'll ignore the fact that they haven't touched the series in years while I've been practicing non-stop, and just share the details that make me look good. I play as Xianghua, by the way.

Rob was so frustrated that I beat him two times in a row (once while he was playing his preferred character, Mitsurugi) that he literally chucked Ken's controller onto the ground and stomped off. I will never let Rob live that defeat down (until he actually starts practicing and pummels me.)

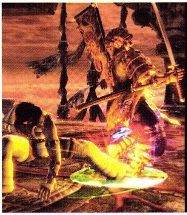
Gary has a fascination with Voldo, and I don't blame him. Voldo's moves are like a bad haircut or a ready-to-pop, pulsating zit. You just can't look away. I defeated Gary a few times, but he's adapting to Voldo quickly. I better start memorizing Voldo's move list.

Roger talked big ("Why are you guys using only the same two moves every time I see you?"), but he refused to actually play any of us. His favorite character is Sophitia, and we all suspect he's been practicing on the side.

Ken's new to fighting games, but he picked up the mechanics quickly. He plays any old character, but his timing instincts are solid and his unpredictability makes him surprisingly deadly.

Scott is too busy writing to pay much attention to *SC IV*. It's tough to be the new guy on the staff! If he ever gets the chance to actually play, though, he'll pick Kulak.

The game is waaay too generous with gold. Even after purchasing every character and a big portion of armor, I had a large chunk of spare change. Time to buy art!

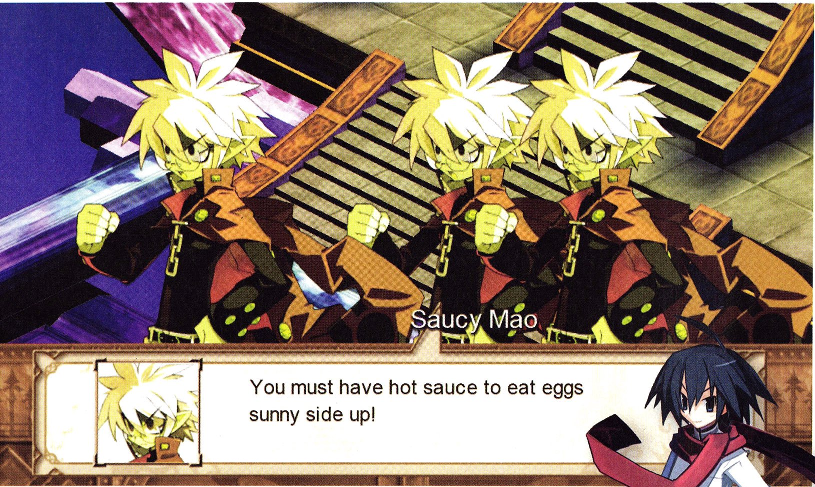


A lost, lonely soul

The Tower of Lost Souls mode plays like a single-player campaign. Ascend a 60-floor tower by defeating enemies. The twist: you can earn a treasure chest on each floor by achieving certain conditions (like winning all battles with a ring out or throwing three times). These chests unlock armor that you can then equip in the Create A Soul mode. Get to the 20th floor and a Survival mode will unlock (presented as Descending the tower). The caveat is that equipment effects are automatically turned on in the tower—it plays a lot like an RPG, as you constantly have to re-equip your characters if you want to keep progressing. I enjoyed it. It's like a challenging fighter-RPG mini-game tossed into a 3D fighter, and it adds more depth and replayability when you can't find anyone to battle against.

Other single-player modes included in the game are the traditional Story (five stages per character, nonsensical plot, and two difficulty levels, Normal and Hard), Arcade (advance through eight stages for a score and rank, equipment effects off), and Training modes. You can purchase art in the museum, peruse your battle records (you earn Honor, which is like Trophies, as you meet certain game goals), and view cutscenes. Purchasable character demonstrations are regrettably missing.

The final single-player "mode" is the character creation. Oh boy, the boys are going to love this one. Choose your character's body type (muscularity and "physique," which really should be called "breast size"), equipment skills, hair color, fighting style, and most importantly, clothing. Yes, you can dress them in bikini type "armor," and yes, you can change the color to make it blend into the characters' skin… Ya'll go have fun trying to make your characters look naked. I'll have fun trying to make the clothing match and look stylish. (Hey, I don't judge you!)



Saucy Mao

You must have hot sauce to eat eggs sunny side up!

Hmm, I prefer soy sauce on my sunny-side-up eggs. With toast. Do you think that's why those Saucy Maos look so angry?

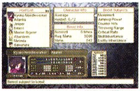
PS3 | R

Disgaea 3:

Absence of Justice

Evil Academy, where it's good to be bad

PS3 PRICE: $49.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: NIS America DEVELOPER: Nippon Ichi Software



Yo ho, a pirate's life for me

A new introduction to the Item World is Reverse Pirating. Every 20 levels, you can Reverse Pirate once (assuming you've stolen a pirate ship from the randomly-spawning pirates you've beaten and have unlocked the Pirates Pirating Pirates club). When Reverse Pirating, you have a limited number of turns to defeat enemies, steal treasure, and get all your characters back onto the boat. It's a challenge and extremely lucrative…if you're successful.

For some, high school was a hellish nightmare of midterm exams and treacherous social etiquette. For the students at Evil Academy, high school actually *is* hell. Literally. Every inch of the underworld is encased within the ever-expanding, oft self-rearranging campus grounds, from the demon teachers too lazy to attend their own classes to the upside-down moral code, in which the good students never do homework and the bad-ass delinquents perform "naughty" deeds like picking up litter or donating blood.

You begin *Disgaea 3: Absence of Justice* as Mao, the most impressive honor student in the school's history, who's determined to annihilate the dean of Evil Academy, the Overlord. Why? Because the Overlord (who also happens to be Mao's father) accidentally stepped on Mao's videogames one too many times, destroying millions of hours worth of game saves, and now Mao seeks murderous revenge. A bit petty, but hey, he's a demon.

Sound trippy? Of course it does. This is *Disgaea,* a series that has always featured zany plots alongside its acid-tinged Strategy-RPG gameplay. *Disgaea 3* does introduce some new elements, including a more prominent role for Geo Blocks,

If a monster and a human character are in the same club, they can morph together via Magichange, unlocking powerful new moves. You can only use them for two turns, though.

a complex Classroom system, and a Class World to complement its Item World (see boxouts), though these new elements feel like icing on a cake already dripping with icing—but really, who complains about too much icing?

I'll return to that thought in a minute. First, for series newcomers, *Disgaea* isn't your typical SRPG. Sure, characters can hop around a grid-defined battleground like they're little chess pieces, performing the expected melee and magic attacks when their turns come around, but if you played like that you'd be missing the point. In *Disgaea,* characters can perform special attack moves. Nothing new there. But when you execute two or more of those special moves in a row on the same enemy, those moves will interweave, creating awesome and occasionally unexpected sequences on the defenseless target. Your characters can also get locked into counter-counterattack battles to the *nth* degree. Moreover, characters can stack on top of each other, seemingly sky high, and then hurl teammates, one after the next, across the entire board. And of course, the famous exploding Prinnies are an old favorite. That's just a *taste* of Disgaea's over-the-top battle sequences, and remember that the battlegrounds themselves are also insane (see Geo Panel boxout).

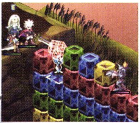
But at heart, *Disgaea 3* is still an SRPG. Yes, Geo Blocks now bring the gameplay to new vertical heights and you can specify which skills you learn in a Mana-based character development system, but I would've loved to see more innovation with the *fundamentals* of strategy-roleplaying gameplay. Like I mentioned earlier, the additions feel like superficial icing, which, though delicious, only adds overbearing volume to an already manic world—but then, that's what fans adore about the series.

Graphically, *Disgaea 3* is a missed opportunity. We've all seen the prowess of the PS3 in games like *MGS4,* but *Disgaea 3* utilizes 2D sprites bouncing around a high-res 3D backdrop. An odd choice, considering the jaw-dropping potential of delivering this world in full HD. A further minor annoyance is the camera, which often resets itself after executing a move, and is limited to four angles at three heights, which often isn't enough to see clearly with all those Geo Blocks.

So, while *Disgaea 3* intimately follows the traditions of its predecessors, I'm crossing my fingers that the next *Disgaea* title will really take advantage of the PS3's power to debut gameplay elements that can *only* be applied in a next-gen system. But while I wait, I'll be traveling to the 100th stage of the Item World and trying to get all my characters to level 9999. Because *Disgaea 3* is still *Disgaea*, which means in spite of its flaws, it's entertaining and addictive as, well, hell.

Teresa Dun

★★★★



A quilt of many colors

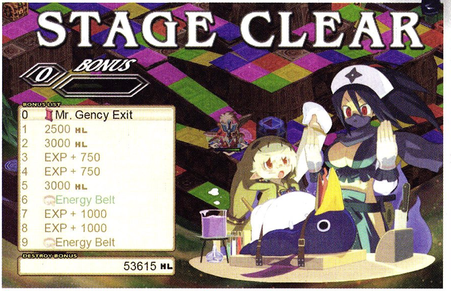
Geo Panels and Geo Blocks. Simple words. Complicated concepts. *Brain-twisting execution.* The battlegrounds in *Disgaea* are quilted with a patchwork of colors. These are called Geo Panels and should be familiar to *Disgaea* fans. Atop some Geo Panels are Geo Blocks. These are also colored.

Geo Blocks possess a status effect, such as Enemy Boost, Invincibility, and Attack Boost. When a Geo Block is on top of a Geo Panel, all of the Geo Panels of that same color take on the effect of the Geo Block. However, Geo Blocks can be stacked, thrown, or destroyed. If you destroy a Geo Block while its on top of a Geo Panel, all of the Geo Panels will transform into the color of the destroyed Block, doing damage to any characters standing on that color and *destroying any other Blocks also on that color.* This means you can chain color transformations. With some careful planning and positioning, it's often possible to transform a splotchy rainbow floor into a single color, all in one turn. But I warn you, it'll make your brain hurt.

To make matters worse (or better, if you're a masochist or have a brain the size of Einstein's), *Disgaea 3* introduces the Geo Block system, where the Blocks can be stacked up to skyscraper heights on top of each other. Blocks can be manually destroyed (by weapons or magic) or as a chain reaction. When you throw a Block on top of Blocks of the same color, the whole group disappears. Just thinking about the different combinations of Geo Blocks and Geo Panels exhausts me. Luckily, for those who don't enjoy planning 10 steps ahead, winging battles still often results in victory, though it's not as elegant as clearing the board of Blocks, Panels, and enemies, all in a few turns (and netting the bonuses that come from doing so).

Saved by the bell

Class isn't about lectures or learning. Not for Mao, at least. For him, class is purely about seating arrangements, extracurricular clubs, and homeroom sessions. Where he places his teammates affect how they perform in battle—two combatants sitting next to each other are more likely to trigger combo attacks on the battlefield. Clubs grant bonuses to their members. Students in the Lift Inspectors club, for example, can Dual Throw teammates. Finally, Mao can call a Homeroom session (similar to the Dark Assembly in previous *Disgaea* games) to have random class representatives around the school vote on issues such as whether to stock higher quality items in the school store or approve the founding of a new club.



STAGE CLEAR

0 BONUS

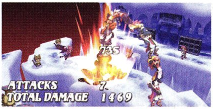
BONUS LIST

0 Mr. Gency Exit
1 2500 HL
2 3000 HL
3 EXP + 750
4 EXP + 750
5 3000 HL
6 Energy Belt
7 EXP + 1000
8 EXP + 1000
9 Energy Belt

DESTROY BONUS

53615 HL

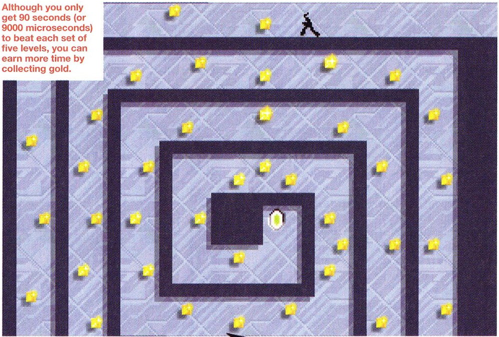
Some quirky and quintessentially Japanase-style art grace the Stage Clear screens. Clearing a stage with a lot of combos earns you bonus items, experience, and money. In the background, you can see an example of how insane Geo Panels can become.



Stacking up your soldiers and swinging them around the battlefield... Yup, this is definitely a *Disgaea* title!

Mao is mad. According to "research" (comics, anime), only heroes can defeat the Overlord... but he's an evil honor student, not a hero.

You have to perform some platforming if you want to grab chests scattered off the battlefield. The jumping mechanic isn't the game's strong point, however. In fact, it's terrible.



Although you only get 90 seconds (or 9000 microseconds) to beat each set of five levels, you can earn more time by collecting gold.

N+

Punishing and unforgiving—just like love

PSP PRICE: $29.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Atari DEVELOPER: Metanet Software / SilverBirch Studios

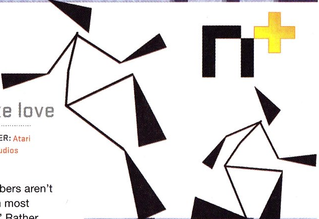
PSP | R
PS3 | R

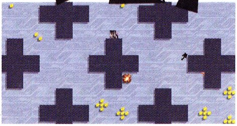
42 11, 26, 73, 58, 7.

No, the above numbers aren't a snap count, and I'm most definitely not about to shout "Hike!" Rather, they're a random sampling of the number of times I've played an *N+* level before I finally beat it.

For some of you, that's all the info you'll need to pass on this game. 73 attempts for a standard single-screen level that can be beaten in less than 10 seconds? Excessive, to say the least!

For the rest of you, *N+* is old-school classic action that epitomizes the notion of "just one more try." The game is as simple as it looks in the screenshots: a 2D pixel ninja (yes, that's a ninja) who can run and jump and...that's it. But what sets *N+* apart are the spectacular ragdoll physics. Every action you take will tug at your wee ninja, pulling him in various directions at appropriate velocities based on realistic physical reactions. That means you really can get from point A to B, despite the abundance of obstacles (mines, drones, lasers, missiles, perilous drops) if only you can time your running, leaping, wall jumping, and falling just right. The game requires a precision of action that can be measured in microseconds, but the frustration can quickly turn to elation when you finally nail a particularly challenging level on that 73rd attempt.



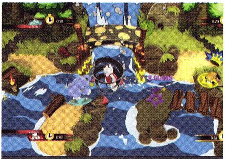


Think it looks easy? Think again. Leaping from block to block is simple enough, but try doing so with missiles blasting and a clock ticking down.

Despite its addictive simplicity, *N+* does eventually reach a breaking point. For me it came about halfway through the 200 single-player levels, when I could no longer avoid death within the first few microseconds and I no longer cared to keep trying. The multiplayer levels add a few more hours of goofy fun, but you'll need to find a second player who also bought *N+* for ad hoc play. Still, if you're someone who thrills to the sadistic joy of old-school gaming, and if you have any interest in building (and sharing) your own levels using the robust level editor, *N+* might be just the punishment you deserve.

Gary Steinman

★★★



Most levels can be manipulated in some way. Closing those gates will stop the water flow and let you collect clams more easily.

Hail to the Chimp

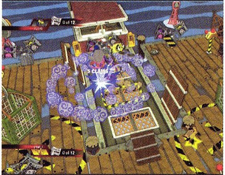
Not exactly *Animal Farm*

PS3 PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: GameCock DEVELOPER: Wideload Games

In order to be successful, a party game must be both simple and addictive. *Hail to the Chimp*, unfortunately, only nails the first half. Each of its 16 mini-games feature nearly identical gameplay: beat your opponents silly while collecting clams (yes, *clams*). What you do with those clams changes depending on the mini-game's objective, which can either add a thin layer of strategy or just annoy the crap out of you. Level design and AI are similarly hit-or-miss, and the combat never advances past button-mashing. Still, the frantic action should be enough to keep you briefly entertained (provided you're playing with friends), and you can't deny the charm of the game's overall presentation. If you're looking for a cheap, pick-up-and-play party game, you could do worse than *Hail to the Chimp*, but you're unlikely to make it a regular on game night.

Scott Butterworth

★★½



The levels sometimes look "flat," which affects depth perception and can make it difficult to gauge your exact position.

As you play through *Hail to the Chimp*, you'll unlock little videos including one called "Hot Coffee." That one's, well, pretty entertaining.

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TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Language
Use of Alcohol
Use of Tobacco
Violence

PANDEMIC

EA

games radar

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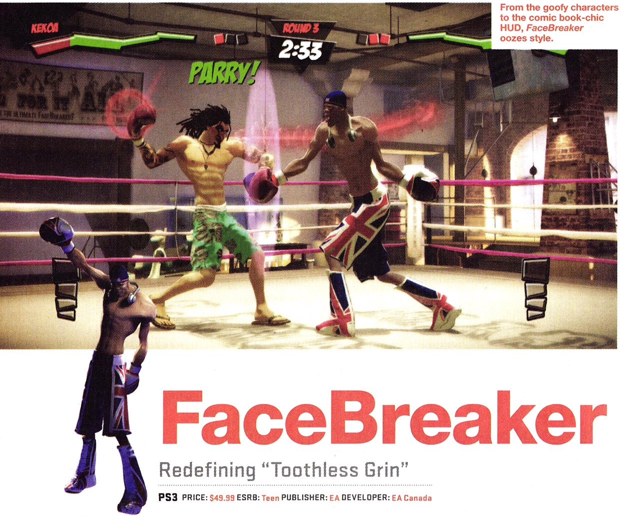


From the goofy characters to the comic book-chic HUD, *FaceBreaker* oozes style.

FaceBreaker

Redefining "Toothless Grin"

PS3 PRICE: $49.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: EA DEVELOPER: EA Canada

PS3 | R

Don't be fooled by *FaceBreaker's* cartoony exterior. It may look harmless enough, but that colorful candy shell—which, admittedly, is delightfully goofy—disguises the ashen heart of a hardcore fighting game that, while occasionally quite frustrating, offers a satisfying challenge and an unexpectedly deep and demanding combat system.

Though the core pugilistic mechanic is by no means a simulation of boxing, you can't simply whale on the punch buttons and expect to win. To become the big kahuna of the brawling arts you must utilize dodges, parries, stuns, and throws, all of which require precise timing and a great deal of self-discipline—a tall order when a literal fistful of synthetic leather is rocketing towards your head. Only once you've mastered these techniques will you be able to land enough consecutive blows to fill your Breaker Meter, which can be cashed in to initiate any of four levels of spectacular special attacks.

The learning curve, however, is steep, and conquering the Brawl For It All single-player campaign on even the easiest setting feels almost impossible at first. The AI is relentless, battering you with an endless barrage of punches that's simultaneously overwhelming and infuriating, and trying to block the onslaught amounts to a guessing game, since you must choose to block either high or low and nothing short of clairvoyance can help you.

But as you adapt to *FaceBreaker's* particular brand of fighting, frustration slowly gives way to satisfaction. You'll learn to dodge punches, land breakers, and generally control each fight in ways that originally seemed impossible, resulting in a feeling of genuine accomplishment. And truly, nothing is quite as exhilarating as successfully connecting with a *FaceBreaker* for an instantaneous victory.

Unfortunately, while you can avoid the unforgiving AI altogether by opting to play with your friends online or in the cleverly designed Couch Royale mode—a winner-stays-on tournament in which knockdowns carryover between matches—you can't escape the lack of character diversity. While each character is remarkably distinctive in their personalities and idiosyncrasies, their fighting styles aren't noticeably different, barring their unique throws (some of which are annoyingly more useful than others). True, there are only so many ways to box, but it could still limit the game's lasting appeal.

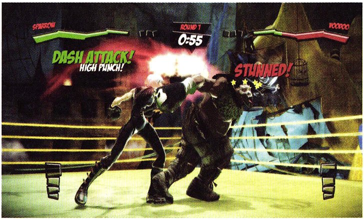
Slightly more aggravating is the fact that both fighters regain nearly all of their health between rounds, meaning a round counts for nothing if you don't actually knock your opponent down. And even if you're winning a match in terms of the number of knockdowns, it will still go to sudden death without an actual knockout.

Despite these complaints, *FaceBreaker* manages to be damn fun for fighting fans of all stripes. After all, faces were made to be broken…or something like that.

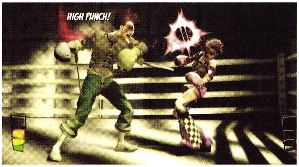
Scott Butterworth

★★★½

The arenas featured in *FaceBreaker* are full of life and detail. Our favorite little touch is the pair of boxing crabs that skitter around the edge of the Cave ring.

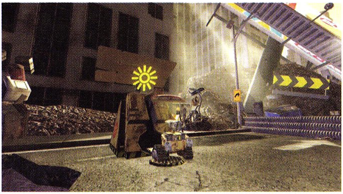


Every character has a stun attack, but unfortunately, some are far easier to pull off than others. Most people will see Sparrow's coming from a mile away.



Character's don't get any quirkier than Socks, whose boxing gloves are sock puppets.

Enter this code in the **Cheats** menu to unlock *WALL-E's* bonus features: WALL-E, AUTO, EVE, Steward.



***WALL-E* will appeal to young platform game fans the most, but it might be too challenging for kids under seven years of age.**

WALL-E

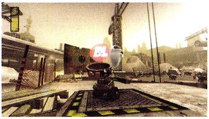
Buy N Large, a decent game

PS3 MSRP: $49.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: Heavy Iron Studios

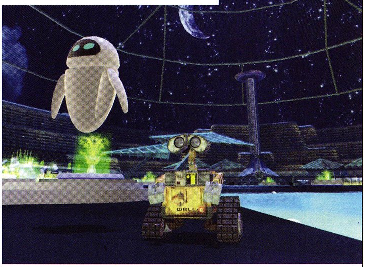
It's a shame we've come to expect so little of movie license games. *WALL-E* at least manages to avoid the usual "go directly to landfill" directive for such fare and lets fans of the film relive the storyline. It features an engaging mix of levels, from WALL-E-based platforming to EVE-based flying levels, and even a couple that innovatively feature both characters. Well, innovative might be overstating it, but the co-op integration of WALL-E's cube creation and tossing abilities with EVE's flying and laser blasting skills adds a fresh gameplay dimension. Overall play balance is uneven at times but not insurmountable—a little too hard here, a little too easy there, with a few too many instances (for a kids-focused game) of "What do I do now?" Four (local, not online) multiplayer modes and some unlockables add replay value, but the pursuit of hidden items is more enjoyable than its payoff, which essentially amounts to a couple of smallish secret areas, concept art, and videos.

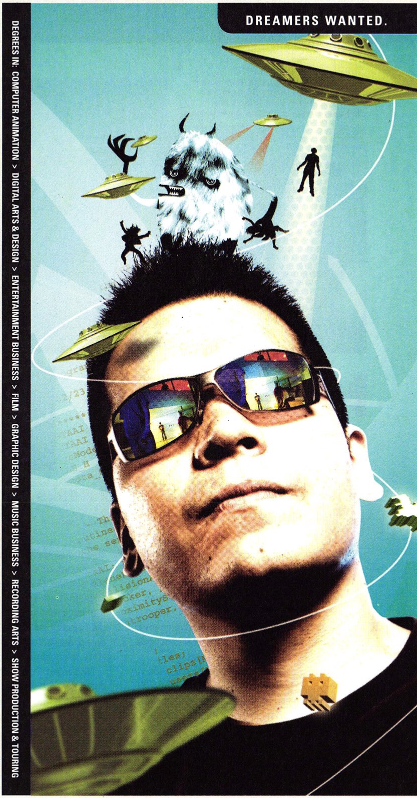
Roger Burchill

★★★



If you've seen the film, the storyline doesn't hold any surprises, but it's still a fun little jaunt through WALL-E's world.

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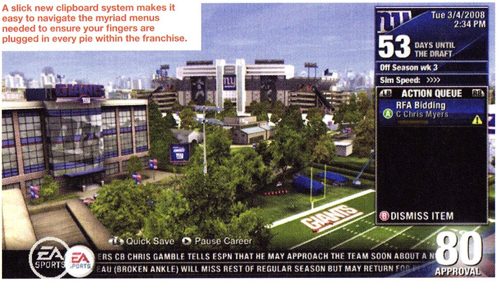
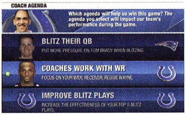
A slick new clipboard system makes it easy to navigate the myriad menus needed to ensure your fingers are plugged in every pie within the franchise.



NFL Head Coach 09

Perfect for sports fan control freaks

PS3 **PRICE:** $49.99 **GENRE:** Sports **PUBLISHER:** EA Sports **DEVELOPER:** EA Sports


COACH AGENDA

Which agenda will help us win this game? The agenda you select will impact our team's performance during the game.

BLITZ THEIR QB
PUT MORE PRESSURE ON TOM BRADY WHEN BLITZING

COACHES WORK WITH WR
FOCUS ON YOUR WIDE RECEIVER, REGGIE WAYNE.

IMPROVE BLITZ PLAYS
INCREASE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF YOUR TOP 5 BLITZ PLAYS.

You can set sliders to adjust the difficulty level of details like QB accuracy and penalties.

PS3 | R
PS2 | R

A desire to live the dream of playing—virtually—in front of thousands of screaming fans has underpinned the *Madden* game franchise's 20 years of success. But standing on the sideline, calling the plays, and wearing the headset almost certainly carries greater pressure. *NFL Head Coach 09* (available as a standalone, as well as packaged in the $89.99 Collector's Edition of *Madden NFL 09)* massively upgrades and updates the PS2 original, making it more accessible through improved presentation and navigation of its deep roster management system.

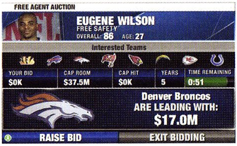
For starters, you can select a quick coach option to find out immediately if you've got what it takes. Patience is the first requirement as a single game can last 45 minutes, even if you make your decisions quickly between each play. How's your attention to detail? How are players reacting to your calls? Should you show emotion or remain calm after a big play either in your favor or against? Will you push the momentum on third and inches to get a big stop, or play it conservatively? Some of these decisions are generated by critical moments where the screen dims to grey and zeroes in on your aging face (in career mode, you can pick from 165 suitably "mature" looking coach faces). Each decision generates goodwill or disappointment with the players, fans, coaching staff, and ownership, and impacts your constantly fluctuating Overall Performance stat.

It's a disparate group to balance, though remaining true to the personality type you select during character creation helps inform the management approach you should bring to the sideline. Successfully achieving set goals (signing draftees, increasing the stats of talented rookies, creating unique plays of your own in the play creator, and more) generate skill points you can spend on improving how far you can influence every facet of your chosen NFL franchise.

NFL Head Coach ably captures the helplessness of watching the on-field action after you've made your play call. But positively influencing a game with the right play call is almost more satisfying than lobbing a bomb for a TD as a *Madden* armchair quarterback. While it's not for every football fan, no doubt those with the penchant for numbers and details could lose themselves in a franchise beyond the scope of the coming season.

Rob Smith

★★★★


FREE AGENT AUCTION

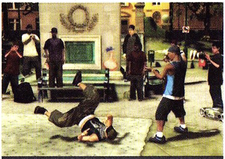
EUGENE WILSON
FREE SAFETY
OVERALL: 86 AGE: 27

Interested Teams

YOUR BID	CAP ROOM	CAP HIT	YEARS	TIME REMAINING
$0K	$37.5M	$0K	5	0:51

Denver Broncos ARE LEADING WITH: $17.0M

Get into bidding wars with other teams over free agents. But remember, every signing impacts your approval rating.


You can't skip your opponent's dance, but you can dis him when he screws up.

B-Boy

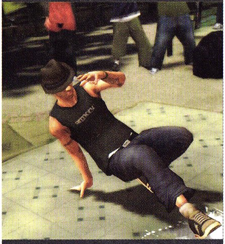
This game is wack

PS2 **PRICE:** $19.99 **ESRB:** Teen **PUBLISHER:** SouthPeak Interactive **DEVELOPER:** FreeStyleGames

Maybe I'm just culturally ignorant, but I totally thought this game would be about basketball. Turns out, "b-boy" actually refers to breakdancing. That's right, *B-Boy* is a breakdancing simulator, which in this case translates to a shallow, repetitive rhythm game. It consists of a never-ending series of dance battles, each of which is setup in exactly the same way: you dance for about 45 seconds before you're forced to watch your opponent do the same, and then you're kicked back out to a menu screen. The actual dancing is equally monotonous. Most moves only require you to tap a direction and a face button, and it takes a couple hours to unlock the more interesting advanced moves. If you already use the term "b-boy" regularly, go ahead and indulge your fantasy. Otherwise, stay off this dance floor.

Scott Butterworth

★½


Despite the name (and these screens), you can actually create a female character.

Legendary breakdancer Richard "Crazy Legs" Colón worked with developers to ensure that the game gave an accurate representation of the culture. No expense spared.

GamesRadar.com Top 7...

Bad guys you didn't want to kill

The gaming murders that left a bad taste in our mouths

The Colossi

Shadow of the Colossus

Most of these huge beasts are just minding their own business and only attack once provoked. Colossus 13 doesn't even retaliate, instead merely attempting to shake you off. They clearly feel pain too - stab them in the head and you'll know about it. Come on, one of them's even got a cool beard, yet you still killed it, didn't you? It's dead now. You did it. Shame on you.

Wanna read more?

- Stereotypical gamers we hate
- Gaming nudity you didn't notice
- Secret shame games

Head to:

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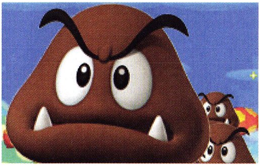
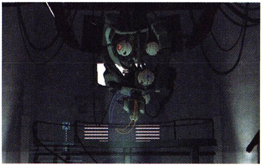


Goombas

Super Mario Bros.

If you stand still and they hit you, you die, but then that's true of buses and you don't go around stamping on them. You only get 100 points per kill too - the gaming equivalent of a $5.00 whole chicken. Has life really become so discounted?



GLaDOS

Portal

Just as hostages can come to bond with their captors, so you end up liking GLaDOS - the female-voiced computer in Portal, the Best Game Ever Made (TM). Guilt for killing her is prolonged because you have to do it a piece at a time. While she talks to you. (Sniff.)

Orbinaut

Sonic the Hedgehog

After these critters toss their spikes they're just cute, marshmallowy-looking creatures that just stare and slowly move forwards. They're now totally harmless. Are you really such a bastard that you'd kill them? Yep, us too. But we felt dirty afterwards.

Big Daddies

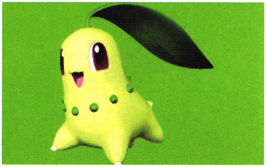
BioShock

They're huge, ugly, armed with a massive drill and turn violent with only the smallest provocation, but the Big Daddies still make us sad when they die. They're only protecting their Little Sister after all. 'Wake up, Mr Bubbles?' Sorry, ain't gonna happen.

Spotty Bulorb

Pikmin

This is the angry mob lynching of gaming, The Spotty Bulorb is surrounded in its sleep, worn down and then killed. While its children watch! Or maybe you killed them first? OK, so it's just like nature. But nature can be so cruel.



Level 1

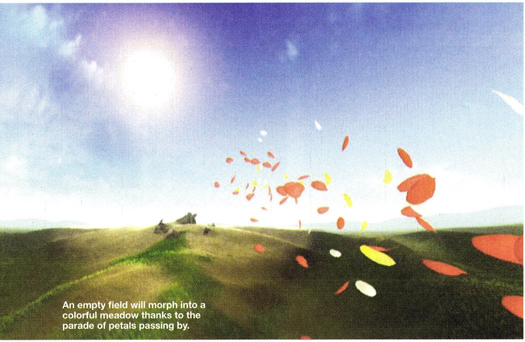
Pokemon

You've been playing for ages and you run into a low-level Pokemon. That's when you realise your super-powered team of fighters has become a remorseless unit. What chance does a level 2 Pidgey have against your level 67 Glaceon?

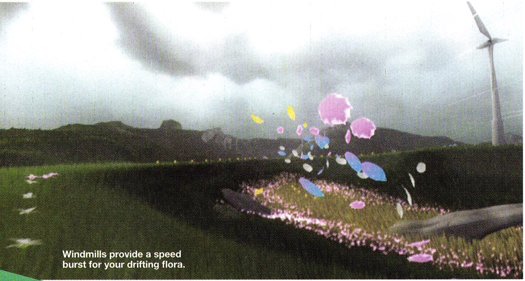
PSN PREVIEWS

FALL AND WINTER PSN TREATS

With titles like *PixelJunk Monsters, Super Stardust HD,* and *Elefunk* under its belt, the PSN is starting to show its mettle as a continuously updated, reliable source of PlayStation goodness. Here are 10 upcoming PSN games that already have us drooling.



An empty field will morph into a colorful meadow thanks to the parade of petals passing by.



Windmills provide a speed burst for your drifting flora.

Flower

RELEASE: 2009 **DEVELOPER:** thatgamecompany

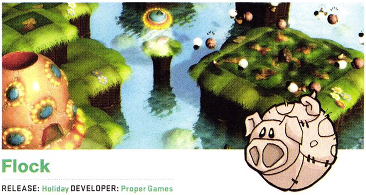
WHAT IS IT? A poem. No, we're not being cute. That's how creative director Jenova Chen describes his latest effort (as opposed to his previous PSN darling, *flOw,* which he claimed was more of a haiku). Right, so what's that mean? First, there's a deeper story here, revolving around the dreams of flowers trapped in an urban environment. Once you enter these floral dreamworlds, you control a lone petal (or is it the wind?) as it drifts, glides, loops, speeds, swirls through pastoral fields, collecting other petals along the way, triggering various reactions and completing obtuse objectives. The theme of the game is "life in balance," and the ultimate goal is to bring about "transformation," both within the dream and in the larger world. In one of our demo levels, we couldn't help but gasp in delight as our parade of petals left a medley of brilliant colors in their wake. Then, when we emerged from our dreamscape, we returned to our drab urban setting to see it likewise suffused with new color.

If all this sounds a bit pretentious for your tastes, you can always just linger in the fields, luxuriating among the 200,000 individually simulated blades of grass, performing visually spectacular vegetal aerobatics. Either way, Chen aims to explore the emotional palette of videogames, evoking feelings that aren't often explored in virtual interactive settings—all with simplistic Sixaxis motion control and a single button.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED We loved the relaxed, impressionistic gameplay of *flOw,* and *Flower* looks to be a much bigger, more ambitious game. Chen also promises a wider variety of gameplay, along with more secrets and surprises. Best of all: "We will figure out a very interesting way to implement Trophies," Chen promises.

BUDDING PERFORMERS "We highly encourage you to play in front of other people," Chen says. *Flower* is meant to be a cinematic experience, something that can be fully explored in one marathon session in front of family and friends, with the gamer putting on a personalized performance that should dazzle everyone in the room.

Gary Steinman



Flock

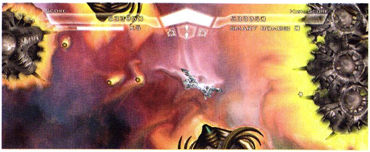
RELEASE: Holiday **DEVELOPER:** Proper Games

WHAT IS IT? A puzzle game that has you (as a UFO) leading livestock through an obstacle course of cliffs, mud holes, and other pitfalls until they're within reach of the "MotherFlocker" (the mama UFO), conceivably to be abducted for inappropriate experimentation. It's darkly cute.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED When the sheep, cows, pigs, etc. die, their spirits don wings and a halo as they float to heaven. When a cow poops, pigs roll in it. When a boy sheep sees a girl sheep, he follows her like, er, a sheep. When the girl sheep dies, the boy sheep cries. Yes, they're little touches, but we like the little touches.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS Snuggle up, because *Flock* offers two-player local (and online) co-op. This game has an aura attractive to non-traditional gamers. Rope them in!

Teresa Dun



PowerUp Forever

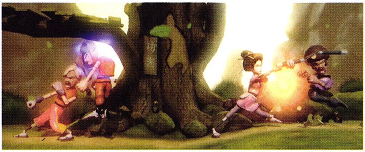
RELEASE: Summer **DEVELOPER:** Blitz Arcade

WHAT IS IT? A shooter that literally has no outer boundaries. You can move infinitely in any direction, blasting away through visually compelling backdrops that resemble ever-changing buckets of paint pressed between panes of flat glass, with alien nano-creatures swarming all around.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED The mechanics might be familiar (move with one stick, shoot with the other), but the hypnotic backdrops will keep us exploring the limitless environments. Also innovative: As you level up, you will grow in size, and larger enemies will begin to notice and attack you while smaller foes will recede into the background.

NO TROPHIES?! At a recent showing, Namco Bandai mentioned they might not have Trophy support at release. But, but...this is the perfect game for Trophies! C'mon, guys!

Gary Steinman



Ragdoll Kung Fu: Fists of Plastic

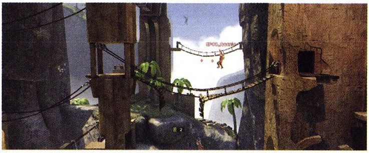
RELEASE: 2009 **DEVELOPER:** Tarsier Studios

WHAT IS IT? Fighter follow-up to Media Molecule's *(LittleBigPlanet)* PC-only *Ragdoll Kung Fu,* buoyed by funny, frenetic fisticuffs supporting single- and multiplayer modes for up to four fighters.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED The frenzied action is amped up by obstacles and objects that can turn the tide of battle in either direction; slow opponents by breaking pots over their noggins or pushing them into the path of a powerful pendulum.

SIXAXIS CONTROLS THAT DON'T SUCK In addition to accessible button-based blocking, punching, jumping and kicking, you can shake the controller for a devastating earthquake-like attack or flip it upside down to assume the life-replenishing Lotus position.

Matt Cabral



Crash Commando

RELEASE: Fall **DEVELOPER:** EPOS Game Studios

WHAT IS IT? An arcadey, side-scrolling shooter borrowing the best elements from classics such as *Contra* and *Bionic Commando,* but sweetening the deal even further with chaotic 12-player match-ups.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED Brilliantly blended 2D and 3D visuals make this one easy on the eyes, especially when your guns-and-grenades–fueled arsenal gives way to slick destructive effects and fiery explosions.

TAKE THAT *BIONIC COMMANDO* Your pint-sized protagonists may not have kick-ass appendages, but their fun-to-fly jetpacks could easily give Rad Spencer's grappling arm a run for its money.

Matt Cabral

ANOTHER GLIMPSE AT HOME

WHILE AT E3, WE TOOK A QUICK TOUR OF HOME, LED BY JACK BUSER, THE DIRECTOR OF HOME

As Buser walked us through the bowling alley (shooting a few rounds of pool along the way), the movie theater (which will allegedly shuffle its video content to keep it fresh), and the sunny outdoor area (where we saw a handful of folks grooving to a radio placed specifically to encourage dancing), he emphasized that SCE Studios London was creating a world tailored for dynamic social bonding.

He pointed to a screen across the lake from where he was standing. That screen, he promised, would show different trailers, but since the screen was displayed in a public space, it would foster community building. People would talk about the trailer they had just watched and that would cultivate friendships and discussions.

BUSER SHOWED US A FEW OTHER TIDBITS THAT HAVE US INTRIGUED AS WELL:

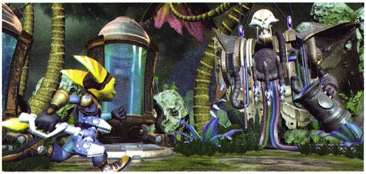
- Instead of walking from place to place, you can teleport via Home's map screen. It's set up like several decks of cards, labeled with titles like Theater or Game Center. When you choose one, it fans out the specific locations in that area, making it simple to arrive instantly at your destination.
- In the *Uncharted* space, we saw a bar dressed up in *Uncharted*-style graphics. These spaces will change (as determined by the developer) and occasionally hide secrets or Easter eggs. We saw a door in the *Uncharted* bar that was secured with a touch pad lock. Until you discover the code, you'll never find out what's behind that door.
- A bubble machine isn't usually a fascinating item (unless you're young or young at heart), but it is when it's one of the few items we've seen in Home so far. It also happens to be one of Buser's favorite items. If the developers took the time to create an object as random as a bubble machine, we're excited to see what else they have in store.

Ratchet & Clank Future: Quest for Booty

RELEASE: Fall **DEVELOPER:** Insomniac

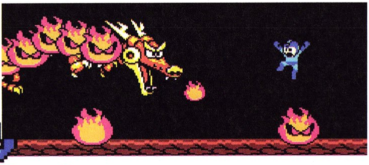
WHAT IS IT? A bite-sized *R&C* adventure picking up where last year's *Tools of Destruction* left off, that promises to provide new answers for fans still pondering the fate of their platforming pals.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED Expanding on the pirate theme we dug so much in *ToD, Quest for Booty* sees Ratchet arriving on a mysterious island in hopes of discovering the whereabouts of his missing metallic buddy. *QfB* also introduces slick new mechanics that'll see Ratchet's wrench stealing more screen time; the versatile tool can now be tethered to items—useful for puzzle solving and rail grinding—as well as used to grab and hurl objects, like flaming lava rocks. All this, plus the return of intergalactic pirate baddies, combines for what looks like a console quality effort.



WHY WE'RE EVEN MORE EXCITED While Insomniac won't confirm it, we're hopeful this could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship between PSN downloadable content and one of our favorite franchises. The prospect of regular four to six hour *R&C* episodes, at $15 a pop, has us more excited than Quark at a press conference.

Matt Cabral



Mega Man 9

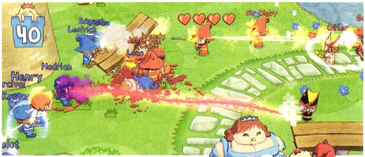
RELEASE: Fall **DEVELOPER:** Capcom

WHAT IS IT? A completely new title in the *Mega Man* series. It re-creates the 2D, 8-bit style graphics and old-school platforming of the original games and features a familiar cast (Dr. Wily, Dr. Light, and of course, Mega Man). The events take place after the ending of *Mega Man 8*.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED It's been 12 years since the last *Mega Man* title! Keiji Inafune, Mega Man's original character designer, is directing the designs in *Mega Man 9*.

IT'S BEEN HOW LONG?! The fact that, well, it's been 12 years since the last *Mega Man* title! Will this be a nostalgic romp down memory lane or a recipe for frustration?

Teresa Dun



Fat Princess

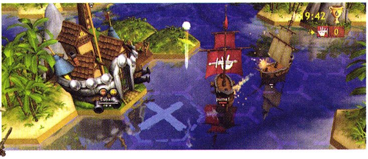
RELEASE: 2009 **DEVELOPER:** Darkstar Industries

WHAT IS IT? Up to 32-player action-packed romp sporting an appealing mix of stylized cartoon visuals, over-the-top gore, and tweaked versions of multiplayer staples like "team deathmatch."

WHY WE'RE EXCITED Funny and fun, "capture the flag" plays more like "capture the fattie" as teams attempt to kidnap their opponent's princess, while force feeding their own rotund royalty in an effort to make her too heavy to haul.

DO WE LOOK FAT? Feeding cake and cookies to your hungry highness is a hoot at first, but will putting all their calories in the obesity-skewering basket yield a one-joke pony for Darkstar?

Matt Cabral



Age of Booty

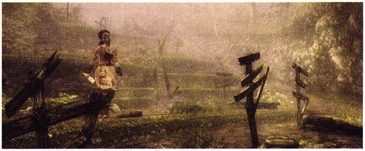
RELEASE: Fall **DEVELOPER:** Certain Affinity

WHAT IS IT? Previously called *"Plunder," Age of Booty* is a real-time strategy title that takes place on the high seas, with both single-player and multiplayer (up to eight players online; up to four per console).

WHY WE'RE EXCITED Rampaging pirates, upgradeable ships, a board-game feel, all on a high-res TV...what's not to like? We'll finally get to live our fantasy of being Jack Sparrow. Three cheers for rum!

MASTER OF THE SEAS The game ships with 25 multiplayer maps, but if that's not enough for you (being the greedy pirate that you are), you'll be able to create and share custom maps via an in-game map creation system.

Teresa Dun



Siren: Blood Curse

RELEASE: Summer **DEVELOPER:** SCE Japan

WHAT IS IT? Twelve downloadable chapters (in three packs of four episodes, or one monster 12-episode pack) follow 2004's PS2 survival horror hit, *Siren*. It retells some of the original's story while adding new spine-tingling twists.

WHY WE'RE EXCITED Zombies, creepy disappearing villages, and the ability to see through the eyes of others, all delivered in more affordable chunks ($14.99 for the first four-pack) sets an intriguing precedent for game delivery.

OPPORTUNITY MISSED Where we figured to download (and anticipate) an episode at a time, in fact you can buy the full 12-pack for $39.99. Since it's really not testing individual chapter delivery, what can we learn?

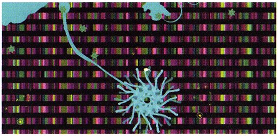
Matt Cabral

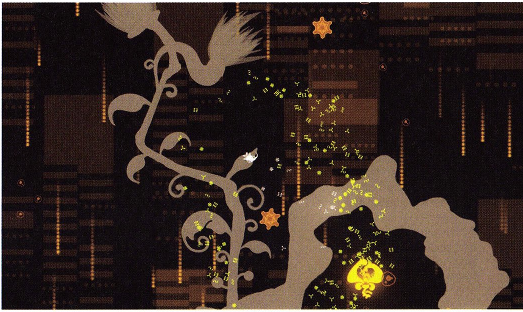
PlayStation Network Games

Downloadable games and add-ons for less than the price of a plastic lightsaber replica. We say Yea or Nay.

+ **YEA** You'll get full value for your money.

− **NAY** No legs, no fun, no value.





PixelJunk Eden

PRICE: $9.99 **DEVELOPER:** Q-Games

+ It's no secret that I have a stalker-sized obsession with Q-Games' last offering, *PixelJunk Monsters.* So I booted up *PixelJunk Eden* with tremendous expectations, partly because of my adoration for *PJM* but also partly because a word like "Eden" evokes images of bliss, delight, and Zen-like serenity. How would it compare to the frenetic, strategy-heavy pace of *PixelJunk Monsters?*

Besides an emphasis on simple controls, the two games are nothing alike. *Eden* is set in a series of gardens, and you play as a green-thumbed Grimp that can only move by jumping, gripping plants or rocks, and swinging around branches via a thin spool of silk it ejects. Think of it as soaring and falling instead of platforming. The goal is to expand your own garden (sleekly disguised as the main menu) by locating 50 garden-enhancing Spectra (a sort of magical fertilizer) concealed across 10 stages. (A reward awaits those persistent enough to get all 50.) The stages themselves are beautifully constructed, with music and colors that evolve as you collect more Spectra. To access the higher strata of each stage, you fertilize seeds by touching and dispersing the pollen floating around the level. The seeds then grow into towering sunflowers, thin vines, and other plant life that you can use to launch yourself upwards. Impeding your progress are enemies that can knock you back down to the ground and a (fortunately refillable) time gauge.

Exploring *Eden's* gardens is a mesmerizing joy. Though the game can occasionally be frustrating or tedious (though not as tough as *PJM),* the levels are each uniquely designed and so compelling that I kept going back. Even better, *Eden* supports three-player local co-op and YouTube video support, so you can swing through the gardens with friends, record it, and then upload your geeky elite-ness for a shot at Internet fame.

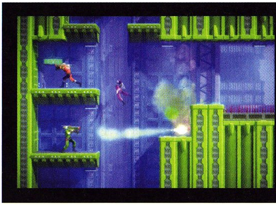
Teresa Dun

PLAYSTATION STORE

Our favorite downloads from the PlayStation Store this month:

▶SUPER STARDUST HD TEAM ADD-ON PACK

With new split-screen versus modes (King of the Hill, Deathmatch), split-screen co-op modes, and one new Trophy to earn, purchasing this add-on is a no brainer. It costs $4.99, though you do need the original game to play it.



Bionic Commando Rearmed

PRICE: $9.99

DEVELOPER: Capcom/GRIN

+ Sporting updated graphics and sound, *Bionic Commando Rearmed* is an enhanced reworking of the '80s arcade and NES action platformer. The original game had the distinction of being a platform game without any jumping—all airborne navigation required the use of the hero's extendable bionic arm—an odd contrivance in its day that seems even more archaic now. But *Commando's* swing and shoot gameplay holds up well and is a fine example of classic 2D side-scroller gaming. Two-player co-op and four-player multiplayer modes add replay value, and 50 in-game Challenge Simulations (think part puzzle game, part obstacle course race) help hone your control skills. Prepare to be challenged and frustrated—often—but addicted as well.

Roger Burchill

Letters

Feedback, Insight, Roger's Mom, and Girl's Got Game

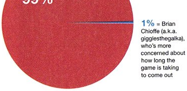
"I was enjoying the article until I read the last two paragraphs. That's when Roger doles out his so-called expert advice." >>

Random quote from a Canadian email we won't be running:

"i dont think the reason that some of the people on the first page of the reveiws have bags over there heads is because they were naughty, i think it's because nobody wants to see their ugly face!" *—Marshall Cormier, Canada*

Pointless Pie Chart of the Month

Percentage of emails that expressed dismay (instead of delight) about the news that *Final Fantasy XIII* is going multiplatform



I HATE ROGER BURCHILL

As a devoted fan of the *Gran Turismo* series, I was eager to read the article in the July 2008 issue titled "Gran Turismo 5 Prologue Online Survival Guide: Roger's Expert Tips for Success."

The article was relatively informative, but I felt it was geared toward the newbies of the series. Still, I was enjoying the article until I read the last two paragraphs. That's when Roger doles out his so-called expert advice. He informs readers to target the most skilled driver on the track and then take them out! He also informs us of the "slam on your brakes when someone is behind you" tactic. Nice, Roger. You should have advised your readers to learn to fine-tune their skills from the better drivers on the track. You also should have advised your readers that when someone is behind you, it is called drafting. You go faster as two cars rather than one car.

I have experienced your advice first-hand online. Nothing is more aggravating than being taken out on lap number one because of an inferiority complex. Thanks again, Roger!

"Boston 77," via email

Firstly, Roger knows all about drafting. That's why you'll often find him walking a mere few centimeters behind other PTOM staffers, in order to better manage his fuel economy while boosting the speed of both editors. Second, his expert tip seems to work wonders against you, judging from its successful implementation against you in online races.

I LOVE ROGER BURCHILL

On page 73 of the August 2008 issue, there's an error in the first column of the *NASCAR 09* review. Roger said there are three different series you can race in: the Craftsman Truck series, the Nationwide series, and the Sprint Cup series. Even though it is the worst (and easiest) of all the series, you failed to mention the Whelen Modified series.

I rented the game and after the first race, I realized it was not worth the six bucks it cost for five days. Now I know to trust Roger with everything he tells me. I'll never get a game you said is bad again. And neither should all the NASCAR fans that read PTOM. Believe me when I say that I would rather play *NASCAR Thunder 2004* than this game. So go buy a real racing game that ain't over easy while I sit here in my recliner playing the worst *NASCAR* ever!!!!

Taylor Fowler, via email

I've been reading your magazine since its PSM incarnation debuted in 1997 and have read every issue since. I even had issues mailed to me from the United States to Europe when I couldn't find the magazine in a small town. I also read other videogame magazines, but none as feverishly as yours. That said, Roger Burchill's review of *GRID* exemplifies some of the very best writing I've ever seen in a videogame magazine. I'm not a racing game fan, by any means, but I'm all over that game now. I don't have to tell you to keep it up; you're a lap ahead. Peace, and thanks for saving me so much money (and time not spent playing bad games) all these years.

Aja, via email

Take that, Boston 77. Two-to-one in favor of Burchy this month.

JONESING FOR JUBBLIES

I was wondering if by any chance you could increase the amount of hot women in the next magazine. Not only that, but make the chest on the women bigger because they are getting kinda boring...but otherwise the magazine is GREAT!

Anonymous, via email

Dear anonymous: Here's another letter, just for you—from a kindred spirit.

PSP IN THE WILD

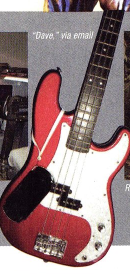
WE ASKED FOR snapshots of your PSP in interesting locations, and you responded with some killer photos! Congrats to Michael Nagy and Matt Oustad, who will both win an assortment of cool skins for their PSPs. Keep sending in photos to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com!

"This is my PSP on the Mississippi River. I call it 'Hooked on PSP.'"

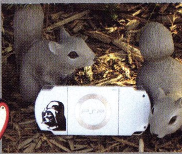
Matt Oustad, via email

"This photo was shot in a Delta Air Lines MD-11 Flight simulator."

Heath Pieczynski, via email



"Dave," via email



Ray Gomez, via email

TREASURE CHESTS

You need women with bigger breasts in the next issue, but the mag is great otherwise!

Anonymous, via email

OK, Roger, enough already.

MORE PS2 & PSP!

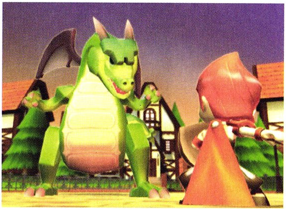
I am really mad. All you guys talk about is the PlayStation 3. You need to talk about the PS2 and the PSP. It's like those two are dead or something. Plus, not a lot of people have a PS3 because they are a lot of money. So I am here to ask, Is there any chance you guys can talk about the PSP and the PS2 a little more?

Almir Pekmezovic, via email

We are really mad. All you ever talk about is our PS3 coverage. We write about the PS2 and PSP all the time, because we love 'em so, so much. Do you see any other magazine devoting full-page previews to *Dokapon Kingdom* and *Yakuza 2?* Or giving full reviews to the PS2 and PSP versions of *Force Unleashed?* Heck, we put a PSP game on the cover back in February *(Crisis Core).* Seriously, we try to cover every significant release on all three PlayStation systems, and we promise to continue to do so in every issue.

CHICKS DIG US

Tonight when my cousin got home from work and decided he wanted to play a little *Battlefield* on his PS3, I had to take time out of my busy schedule of touring the world via *Rock Band* (which, truthfully, I was getting a little tired of in Moscow). I picked up the PSP and thumbed through my options. I didn't feel like getting killed yet again by Genisis on *Crisis Core* and the Mages are kicking my butt in *Tactics*. I was about to pop in my UMD of *Labyrinth* for the millionth time and I noticed a magazine on the table. I chuckled at my cousin's dorkiness, but I shrugged and opened to the back page of the magazine. (I like to read my magazines backwards.) I'm not gonna lie: I don't usually get to the table of contents, but I loved reading your magazine. It was like I had all my friends go out and check out the new games and come back and fill me in. I could relate to most of the articles too. I always thought my friend was weird for sanding down his old action figures to make "new" action figures; now he's weird for other things instead.



I was also excited to find out there was a girl on your team. (I want to have little goblin minions like Teresa.) I know that there are a lot of female gamers out there, but I don't know any. I'm usually the only girl in the room when I hang out with friends. I kinda forgot where I was going with this rambling e-mail. Oh yeah! I'm definitely gonna buy your magazine, or at least read my cousin's next copy!

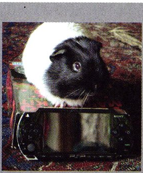
"WanderWoman," via email

Thanks for the kind words. But do us a favor: Buy the magazine instead of borrowing your cousin's copy. Think of it as an act of solidarity with your sister gamer, Teresa.

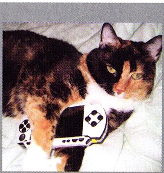
PSN WISH LIST

I would just like to thank all the Sony people for the long-awaited in-game XMB and Trophy update.

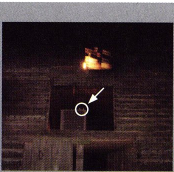
Also, I read that you want to know what's still on



Jessica Jamison-Wells, via email



Shawn McArthur, via email



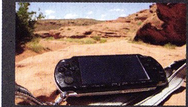
"This is my barn."
Kyle Lesperance, via email

[You're creeping us out, Kyle.]

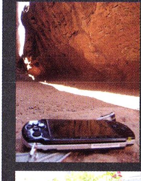
A DAY IN THE LIFE OF MY PSP AND ME

First I got up and got dressed. All decked out in my favorite Playstaion duds (Cargo shorts, hat, and t-shirt).

Then, I had a nice healthy breakfast with my PSP.



Later in the day, I took a nice hike in the Red Rocks of Utah. But it was too hot in the sun.



So I found this great cave to take a break in, and played some games while I rested in the shade.

When I got home, I had a nice cold glass of iced tea on the patio with the PSP.

Later, I sat down with my favorite magazine, and got some reading in…

Finally, after a long day, I fell asleep with my PSP in hand. The end.

Michael Nagy, Saint George, Utah

our PSN wish list? Here goes:

I believe I speak for many Sony fans, when I ask you guys (or gals) for a PSN name change service, even if it's once a month. A good way would be for every level you gain for your PSN, you get one point, and you use those points to change your PSN (like changing your PSN costs one point, then the next time it's two, then four, then eight, then 16 etc.).

"Renji1 Renji2," via email

I'd like the in-game XMB to work with PS2 games. I'd like it as well if my PSN downloads would continue downloading while I play PS2 games. Also friend login and mail notifications don't appear while playing PS2 games.

I don't know if it's possible, but those updates would be really useful since I like to replay my old games a lot and I often miss friend invites to games because of this.

David Desbiens, Quebec, Canada

Two fine ideas. Keep sending your PSN ideas to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com.

THEY'RE SCARED OF US

I was just wondering if there was any reason why Xbox and PlayStation gamers can't play online together besides the fact that we would totally p0wn.

Paloma Jones, via email

Nope, that's the only reason. We would totally p0wn.

OH, THE HORROR

Why hasn't create-a-character yet been added to the survival horror franchise? Using the technology of the EyeToy, couldn't you see yourself being the main character in, say, *Silent Hill?*

I mean, all the main characters look the same, regardless of design. They're all clean-cut, fairly strong-jawed men (honorable mention to Heather). It would be nice to see yourself in such a weird environment, almost as if you've been cast to play the role of the main character.

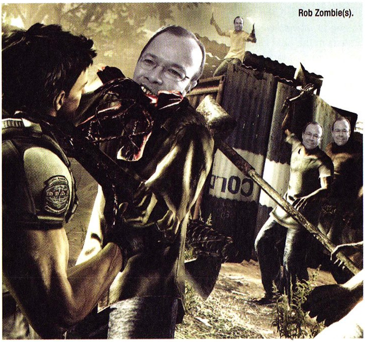
Carlos Cook, via email

Great idea, Carlos. But here's an even better one: mapping your features (or those of, say, your boss) onto the baddies!

Next month

In PlayStation: The Official Magazine

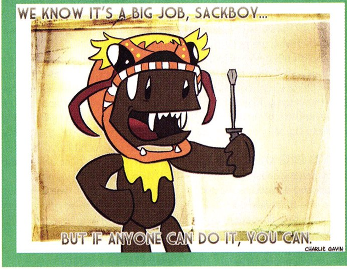
The war against the Chimera hits home in ***Resistance 2.*** We have the biggest story ever on the ***biggest PS3 Holiday release.*** Plus, let your PS3 be the center of your home entertainment setup with our ***PS3 Command Center*** guide.



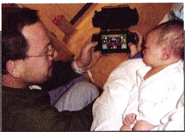
Rob Zombie(s).

FAN ART

Charlie Gavin, BlankPixels.com

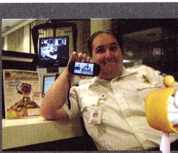

WE KNOW IT'S A BIG JOB, SACKBOY...
BUT IF ANYONE CAN DO IT, YOU CAN.
CHARLIE GAVIN

contact Send your thoughts and comments to PTOM_letters@futureus.com. What else were you going to do with them anyway?



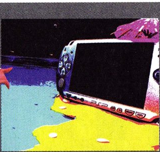
"When my son was born he had a blood infection and had to stay a little over a week in the hospital. Since I don't watch TV much, I asked my wife (the boss) if I could get a PSP. I had been asking her since it came out, but she wanted me to wait for the price to go down. Anyway, she gave me the okay and I got one. My son found the screen activity fascinating. Here's a picture of my four-day-old son also enjoying the PSP."

Steven Madge, via email

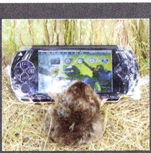


Josh Bielak, Cedar Lake, IN

Clint Fowler, via email



Sean McCarthy, via email



"I spend most of my time digging underground tunnels. But when I get the time, I like to pop my head above the ground and play with my PSP."

Doug Swaller, Arnold, Missouri

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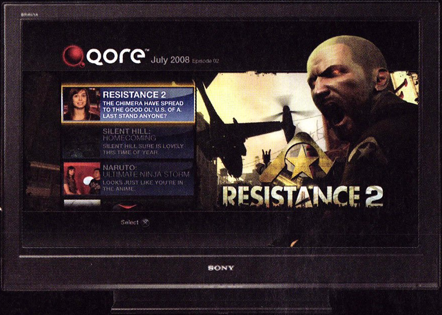
Qore host
Veronica
Belmont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SONY

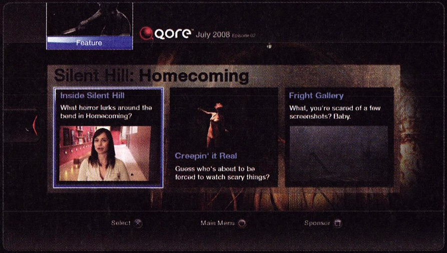
RESISTANCE 2
THE CHIMERA HAVE SPREAD TO THE GOOD OL' U.S. OF A. LAST STAND ANYONE?

SILENT HILL: HOMECOMING
SILENT HILL SURE IS LOVELY THIS TIME OF YEAR.

NARUTO: ULTIMATE NINJA STORM
LOOKS JUST LIKE YOU'RE IN THE ANIME.

RESISTANCE 2

CONGRATULATIONS! You get to see me make a right fool of myself in a couple of different ways in this episode of Qore. All for your delight and delectation! Here are some of the highlights: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Silent Hill: Homecoming

Inside Silent Hill
What horror lurks around the bend in Homecoming?

Creepin' it Real
Guess who's about to be forced to watch scary things?

Fright Gallery
What, you're scared of a few screenshots? Baby.

qore
Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm

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Madden NFL 09

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HELLBOY II
PAN'S LABYRINTH

- Ever wonder how they make the Chimera move so realistically in *RESISTANCE 2?* I'll give you a demonstration of how motion capture works.
- What makes *SILENT HILL: HOMECOMING* so scary? Watch as I put my own wits on the line to find out.
- The popular anime comes to life in *NARUTO: ULTIMATE NINJA STORM.* We learn more about how different styles of gameplay come together.
- After you watch the feature, go try it yourself! We have the DEMO OF *NARUTO* ready for you to check out.
- It's been 20 long years since the first *MADDEN* game came onto the scene. We head to Florida to talk about how things have changed in that time!

I hope you enjoy the episode. We're hard at work getting ready for the next release, so STAY TUNED FOR MORE!

Veronica Belmont

Photograph by Lan Bui

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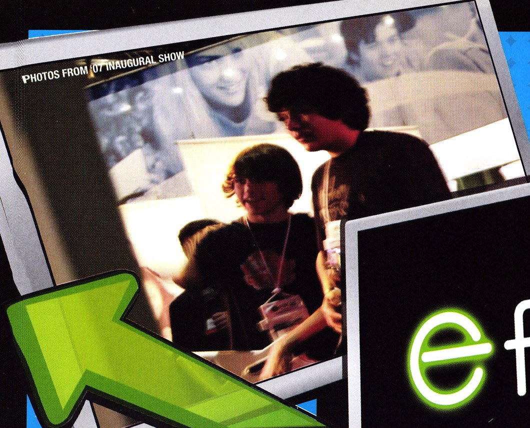

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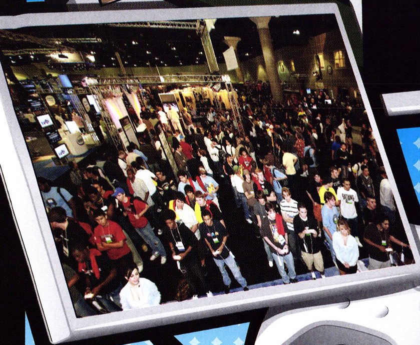
POWER UP & PLAY



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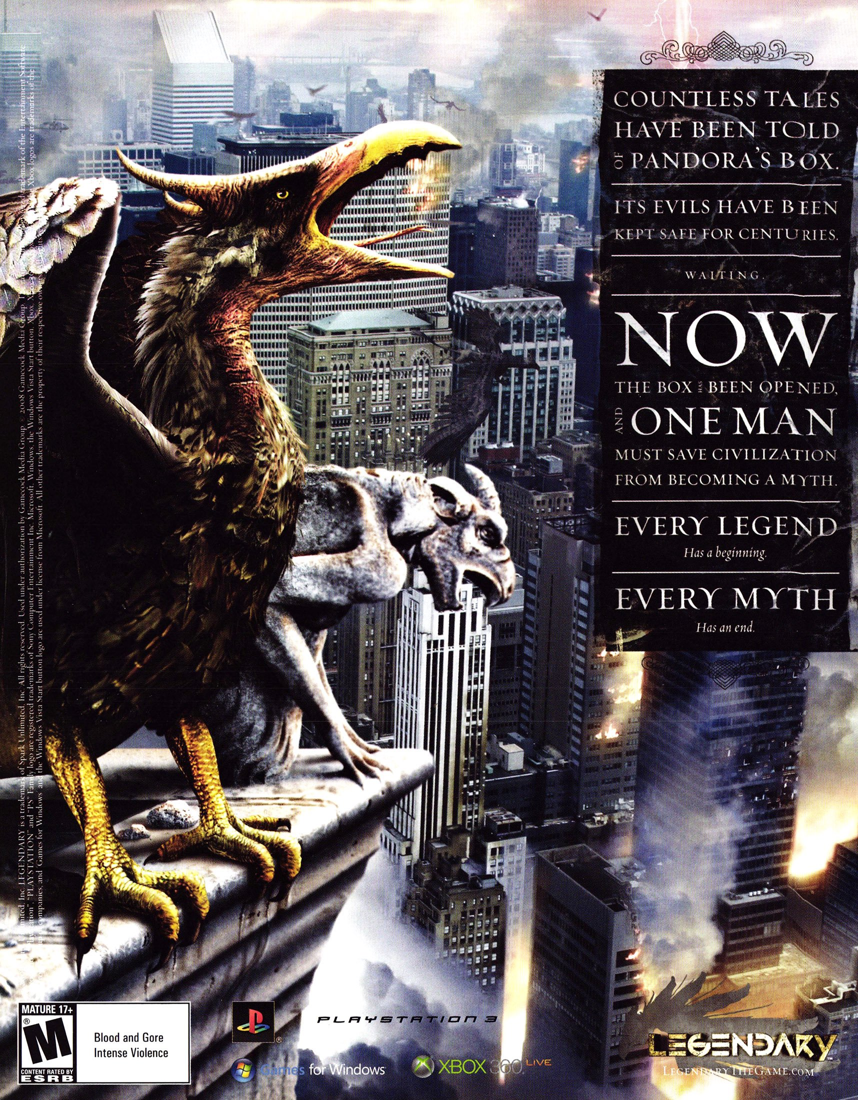
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WAITING.
NOW
THE BOX HAS BEEN OPENED,
AND ONE MAN
MUST SAVE CIVILIZATION
FROM BECOMING A MYTH.
EVERY LEGEND
Has a beginning.
EVERY MYTH
Has an end.
MATURE 17+
M
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Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
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